

# 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.

## Heinz workers stage 24-hour strike in Wigan, England

More than 1,000 Heinz workers staged a 24-hour walkout Wednesday night at a plant near Wigan that produces baked beans.

The strike follows the rejection of a pay offer. The Unite union said further strike action could follow next week. Heinz made a below-inflation offer of 3.3 percent.

## Eurotunnel staff overtime ban in pay dispute

The workforce at Eurotunnel, which carries cars and freight under the Channel connecting England and France, are to engage in a three-day overtime ban in a long-running pay dispute.

Around 250 workers, including train crew and maintenance staff, are to impose the overtime ban at the Dover terminal from today.

Workers rejected management's 1.7 percent pay offer with a non-guaranteed bonus for 2010.

## London tube drivers plan Boxing Day strike

Train drivers on the London Underground rail network plan to strike December 26 in a dispute over bonus payments.

The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) said its members had voted by a majority of 9 to 1 to take industrial action and warned that disruption would be significant.

The capital's underground rail network reaches a busy annual peak Boxing Day, with shoppers in search of post-Christmas bargains and football supporters travelling to matches.

A series of strikes has hit the rail network in a dispute overstaffing levels. ASLEF said it was seeking a premium for drivers prepared to work the day after Christmas.

## Workers on two London tube lines to strike over victimisation cases

London Underground (LU) workers on the Bakerloo and Northern lines are to take industrial action over the sacking of a health and safety rep on the Bakerloo line.

The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union accused LU of victimising Eamon Lynch for his trade union activities and has organised a 24-hour walkout starting December 17, 9 p.m.

Transport for London (TfL) claims Lynch was dismissed after "a serious breach of safety rules on the Bakerloo line."

The strike will take place alongside another on the Northern line, sparked by disciplinary charges brought against Arwyn Thomas, a driver at Morden. The RMT said it believed an unfair dismissal case is likely to be successful in regards to Lynch. The union also said Thomas is a long-standing activist and has been targeted over "unproven allegations" made by strike-breakers.

## UK Rail staff vote on strike over job cuts

Staff on Southeastern Trains started voting this week on whether to strike over job losses in London.

The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union said its members would complete balloting over the next few weeks on whether to take action in protest at job cuts at London's Victoria and Charing Cross stations.

The job cuts will compromise safety, and increase delays and disruption at a time when fares for the public have increased by 13 percent.

Drivers on London Midland are to strike December 23, in a separate dispute over pay and conditions. Workers at Arriva Trains Wales have also backed industrial action.

The Transport Salaried Staffs Association accused First Capital Connect of "daylight robbery" after it said it had discovered some of its fares were due to go up by as much as 46 percent in the New Year.

## **Birmingham city refuse collectors to strike**

Refuse collectors and street cleaners employed by Birmingham City Council have voted overwhelmingly in favour of an overtime ban and work to rule December 17 and strike action on December 20 for 24-hour periods, in response to pay cuts.

The Unite union web site commented: “The workers are furious that the council is cutting their pay by as much as ?4,000 a year.”

The union claims the council said it wanted open negotiations with “all options on the table”, but subsequently reneged on its pledges and took the decision to scrap the payments altogether with no alternatives.

## **Israeli pilots at budget airline in dispute over jobs**

On December 11, a workers’ committee representing pilots employed at Israir announced a dispute with management in reaction to its proposal to fire more than 10 percent of the budget airline’s pilots and to lower working conditions for many others.

The New Histadrut’s Transportation Workers Union said in the most craven manner, “The pilots of Israir have always been loyal partners. We have always known when to bend in favour of assisting the company in reaching its goal and to move it forward.

“We are the first to be conscious of the need for a company efficiency plan. There is no need to tell us stories. However, we will not lend our hands to steps that endanger the future existence of the company.”

The pilots announced their intention to take strike action if the dispute is not resolved.

## **Nigerian bank workers strike**

Workers employed by the Union Bank, one of Nigeria’s largest banks, began strike action December 15. The action will affect branches of the bank nationwide.

The action called by the National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Employees (NUBIFIE) is in support of demands for improved welfare conditions.

The previous day NUBIFIE and Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) representatives picketed the bank’s headquarters in opposition to the bank’s breach of a collective bargaining agreement.

## **Zimbabwean bank workers set to strike**

Members of the Zimbabwe Banks and Allied Union (ZIBAWU) were set to begin strike action this week. The first phase of the action was due to hit eight companies across Zimbabwe, including Standard Chartered and Barclays.

ZIBAWU represents 5,000 members. Its demand is for a 115 percent pay increase, back-dated to July 2010. The Bankers’ Association of Zimbabwe (BAZ) has offered just 5 percent to the lowest paid non-clerical workers earning US\$273 a month. This contrasts to bank executives basic salary of \$15,000, plus perks.

ZIBAWU members were last in action in 2008, when they went on a go-slow.

## **South African Metrorail workers oppose new shift rotas**

Metrorail workers in Johannesburg represented by the United Transport and Allied Trade Union (UTAUTU) and the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) voted for strike action against planned changes to their shift rotas, due to come into effect December 4.

However, following the Passenger Rail Association of South Africa’s (PRASA) application to the Labour Court the strike did not go ahead.

Instead workers took other forms of action. Last Friday, workers due to work a 12-hour shift under the new rota finished work after seven-and-a-half hours.

On Tuesday, PRASA withdrew its court application and is seeking talks with the two unions.

## **South African smelter workers strike enters second week**

Around 700 members of the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA) are in their second week of strike action. They are employed by BHP Billiton at their aluminium smelter works in Hillside. The smelter is the largest in South Africa.

The workers are seeking a three-year deal, rather than a four-year deal with an initial 9 percent pay increase for the first year, 10 percent for the second and 11 percent for the third year. They also want an employer medical aid contribution of 50 percent, six months paid maternity leave and other improvements.



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