

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.

UK National Grid workers vote to take action over pay offer

Workers at the National Grid, one of the world's largest utilities, have voted 590 to 32 for action short of a strike in protest against a below-inflation, three-year pay offer.

The National Grid was fined £8 million on January 6 for misreporting progress on maintenance work. The energy company was fined £15 million in Britain last year for different abuses.

Workers on East London Railway vote for strike

Workers on London's Docklands Light Railway have voted in favour of a strike over disputes including jobs, pensions and working conditions.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union said 162 of its members backed strikes, with 36 against.

Northampton Council workers to be balloted on strike action

Workers employed by Northampton Borough Council are to vote on strike action, after the imposition of a new pay structure and inferior terms and conditions.

The council's new conditions will apply to 1,110 of the lowest-paid workers. One third of council workers would lose money, with more than 1 in 10 employees losing more than £2,500.

Dockers at French ports strike over retirement rights

Dock workers and a large number of staff at the northwestern

port of Le Havre took strike action January 12 to demand early retirement rights for those engaged in sustained hard physical work.

The industrial action shut down shipping terminals at Le Havre, the country's second biggest port, but did not affect cross-Channel ferry services.

National strikes on the country's ports late last year caused major disruption to shipments and oil terminals, particularly in the southern port of Marseille. The FNPDP-CGT union said the current strike would last until at least Sunday.

Staff at French comic book publisher strike over jobs

The remaining four staff at comic book publisher L'Association, responsible for alternative titles such as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, are to take strike action as a result of redundancies and the lack of communication between the owners of the publisher and the staff.

L'Association's distributor closed down recently.

Greek public sector workers to strike in February against austerity measures

Public sector workers are to hold a 24-hour strike next month in protest at the government's austerity policies.

The government has cut public sector wages, frozen pensions and increased taxes in return for a €110 billion (US\$142.5 billion) EU/IMF bailout, and more cuts are expected this year.

Civil servants and private sector employees staged a series of anti-austerity strikes in 2010.

Iranian tyre workers strike over contracts, compensation, bonuses

Around 3,500 workers took strike action at Barez Tires January

1, demanding permanent contracts instead of the current month-by-month one, according to the Free Assembly of Iranian Workers.

Last September, the workers went on a four-day strike.

The Barez workers are also asking for their full 70-hour overtime compensation, rather than the current 40 hours recognised by management. The workers are eligible for one day off every other week. They are calling for two days per week. They are also protesting the reduction in production bonuses since last October.

Nigerian port workers threaten strike action

Workers belonging to the Maritime Workers of Nigeria (MUWN) at the Kirikiri jetty in Apapa have given notice of strike action. They have addressed demands to the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), calling for it to close down Underwater Engineering Nigeria Limited, which trades from the jetty.

MUWN General Secretary Aham Ubani explained that the union had been trying to negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement when the current one expired in March 2010.

According to the union, management of the firm has been victimising union members. At one point, the company locked out the workers, used bouncers in combat gear to police the site and made the workers sign an undertaking to cease agitation before resuming work.

The union has now called on the NPA to remove the firm from the jetty or they will take strike action and bring the whole port to a standstill.

Civil servants in Plateau state, Nigeria, on strike

Civil servants working at the Plateau state secretariat began indefinite strike action last week. The strike is in protest at the huge wage gap that has opened up between civil servants and political and public office holders. Following a government review of salaries in 2008, political and public office holders' salaries increased 350 percent.

According to the civil servants' union, a civil service director earns around N52,000 (US\$340) while the permanent secretary earns N400,000 (US\$2,610). The union drafted a report putting forward proposals to close the gap. The government has so far refused to consider the report, and so the union has taken strike action.

Nigerian federal government workers protest action

Around 500 civil servants working in the Ministry of Labour and Productivity, represented by two civil service unions, took action

Tuesday by occupying the offices of the department's director of finance and his top officials.

The protest was in support of their demand that the minister, Emeka Wogu, explain what has happened to the N90 million (US\$600,000) incentive package they were promised for 2010.

Nigerian doctors at University of Benin strike

Doctors belonging to the Association of Resident Doctors at the University of Benin began strike action last week. The action is in protest over the non-payment of teaching allowances for December 2010.

Zambian railworkers strike

The regional general manager of the Tanzanian Zambian Railway Authority (TAZARA) addressed striking railway workers in Kapiri Mposhi, calling on them to abandon their four-day strike.

The workers' action is in pursuit of a 3 percent pay increase, payment of travel allowances and the supply of safety gear. According to TAZARA management, they are in the process of negotiating a loan from Barclays and would not be able to address the workers' demands until the loan has gone through.

TAZARA recently received an interest-free loan from the Chinese government to upgrade the line from Zambia to Tanzania, which carries copper and other resources to ship to China.

Tanzanian rail workers' action

Workers at the Tanzanian Zambian Railway Authority (TAZARA) in Tanzania are taking action. As reported in December, they went on a go-slow and threatened strike action in their campaign for a new salary scale, a grievance procedure and for the human resources manager, Davison Mulenga, to be removed from office.

They are now demanding an independent committee to investigate the removal of Mulenga. The workers stormed TAZARA headquarters in Dar es Salaam on Monday, where an emergency meeting was being held.



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