

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.

French dockers' strike closes shipping at all main ports

Dock workers shut down shipping terminals at all of the country's main ports January 21 over working terms and conditions. Demands include early retirement for those who carry out hard physical work.

The strike by dockers and port staff disrupted freight traffic at Marseille-Fos on the south coast—France's biggest port—and others including Le Havre on the Channel, Nantes, Bordeaux and La Rochelle, port officials and the CGT union said.

On January 24, strike action partially halted traffic at the French Fos-Lavera oil terminal, the world's third largest.

French teachers to strike against jobs cut

Teachers plan to stage a one-day strike February 10, in protest at government plans to cut jobs in the next school year and to demand an increase in spending on pupils, the country's main education union (FSU) said January 25.

The government aims to save €100 billion (US\$136.12 billion) by 2013 by slashing public sector jobs and freezing public spending.

German energy workers protest over pay

An estimated 4,500 workers at the country's largest electricity producer, RWE, participated in warning strikes January 24 aimed at putting pressure on management ahead of a sixth round of pay negotiations.

The warnings strikes, at RWE sites across the country, also involved the nuclear power plants Biblis in Hesse state and Lingen in Lower Saxony for the first time, according to a statement from Verdi, one of the two unions at RWE.

The mining workers' union IG BCE and Verdi, which represents mainly services staff, have stopped short of blocking production at the power company.

RWE also operates coal-to-power stations and administrative offices. It has offered a less than 3 percent increase from January 2010 for 16 months and a one-off payment. The union has called for 6.5 percent,

retroactive from November 1 for 12 months.

RWE has been posting record profits in recent years.

The workforce at RWE is set to stage a four-hour stoppage this week. Last month, thousands of RWE workers blocked traffic in and out of some big plants for two days.

Finnish teachers' pay strike may block exams

Teachers are prepared to take strike action that could bring a halt to this spring's matriculation exams for upper secondary school pupils, if no agreement can be reached with municipalities on pay settlements, according to a report in *Ilta-Sanomat* January 21.

Industrial action is expected to begin in stages, from early March, just prior to the start of written examinations. Matriculation exams, leading to university entrance, have previously only been cancelled during the Civil War of 1918 and in the war years of 1940 and 1942.

Finland: Strike by fuel personnel at Helsinki airport

A dispute over the scheduling of shifts for maintenance personnel led to strike action by workers at Helsinki-Vantaa Airport January 24. Shell Aviation Finland has refused to follow the guidelines set in the contract negotiated with the Finnish Transport Workers Union (AKT). Shell Aviation is responsible for about half of the fuelling services at Helsinki-Vantaa Airport.

British Airways cabin crew to strike in ongoing job dispute

On January 21, cabin crew at British Airways (BA) voted to strike in the two-year dispute between the airline and its staff over job cuts.

The Unite union did not announce strike dates, as it sought to downplay the action.

Almost eight out of ten crew members who took part in the ballot voted for a strike. More than 10,000 crew members were balloted and 7,335 of them voted in a turnout of 75 percent.

BA cabin crew launched 22 days of strikes last year, including walkouts in five-day blocks over the threat to their jobs.

The strike announcement came on the day after shares in BA ceased trading on the London Stock Exchange, in preparation for the airline's formal merger with Spain's Iberia to form the International Airlines

Ireland: 200 lecturers protest over Croke Park agreement

Over 200 university and institute of technology lecturers gathered in Dublin January 22 to protest against the implementation of the Croke Park agreement in third-level institutions.

The lecturers are demanding protection of the right of academics to permanency and tenure until retirement age.

Croke Park, a pact between the unions, government and public sector employers, imposes a four-year strike ban, huge productivity, flexibility demands and job losses on workers. The Hunt report on higher education proposes longer working hours and shorter holidays, tighter management control and performance-related pay. It also opens up the possibility that academics deemed to be “substandard” by management could be sacked.

Tom Garvin, emeritus professor of politics at UCD, attacked the “thick layer of management” in third-level institutions. He said that in the past five years, Irish universities had been “enveloped in a great brown tide of nonsense on stilts, purveyed by overpaid and under-qualified presidents, provosts, registrars and vice-presidents” of everything, including football fields.

“[Ireland] went from a condition in which no connection was seen between education and economic development in 1950 to a condition in 2011 when it is believed that education has no other purpose than to further economic development.”

Meanwhile, secondary school teachers are to hold a second ballot on the Croke Park pay deal, the *Irish Times* reported.

The Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI) and the Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) have decided to ask members to re-vote on the pay deal, which extends their annual workload by 33-hours a year, after they were given “clarification” by the Department of Education as to the impacts of the package.

Irish waste service workers vote to strike over privatisation

Workers employed in the waste collection service of South Dublin County Council (SDCC) have voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action over plans to privatise the refuse collection service.

Ireland: Aer Lingus cabin crew dispute continues over new rosters

The ongoing dispute between Aer Lingus and cabin crew over the introduction of controversial new rosters has forced the airline to cancel dozens more international flights this week.

The former state carrier said it may eventually cancel 10 percent of its flight schedule.

The trade union Impact has said that 200 cabin crew had been removed from the payroll so far, for refusing to operate the new rosters introduced unilaterally last week. The airline has cut unprofitable routes and reduced staff and fuel costs, resulting in a return to profits last year.

Private sector workers are to take 24-hour strike action February 23 to protest the government austerity policies.

The public sector union ADEDY has called a 24-hour strike for February 10.

Kuwait: Egyptian farm labourers protest meagre pay

Around 120 Egyptian farming workers, working for a company in Sabhan, gathered outside the ministries complex to protest that their less than KD 60 wages had not increased in over four years, according to the *Kuwait Times*, January 19.

Many of the workers said that they had repeatedly complained to the company owners and that each time they were threatened with termination of contract and deportation if they went on with their demands, or if any of them filed complaints with the Ministry of Social Affairs.

One of the farm hands said that they were told that according to the labour law they were not entitled to a pay rise and that they had to settle the problems with the director of the firm. Another said that the company had been transferring workers’ visas to other sponsors without telling them.

Zimbabwean public service workers dispute

Last week the Apex council consisting of the main teachers unions and the Public Service Association announced strike action by their members would begin Monday, January 24. Talks with the government over the unions’ claim for a minimum salary of US\$502 a month had collapsed.

However, after promises of new talks by the government the strike did not proceed. But according to SW Radio Africa News, civil servants were on a go-slow.

The talks took place on Wednesday, January 26, at which the government made a new pay offer of an increase of up to US\$25 a month to be re-evaluated in June. This is far below the workers’ demands. Progressive Teachers Union President Takavafira Zhou, speaking to SW Radio Africa, said the offer was “less than rosy,” but that he would consult his membership.

Nigeria: On-going strike action by Cross Rivers State public employees

Lecturers and medical staff are continuing their strike action in the south-eastern Nigerian state of Cross Rivers. Academics at the Cross Rivers State University of Technology have been on strike since mid-October last year. The lecturers are seeking implementation of the CONUASS and CONTISS agreements made with the federal government. These agreements relate to salary structures and conditions. Their strike meant the new academic year did not go ahead.

Doctors working in the state-owned general hospitals, cottage hospitals

and health centres have been on strike since December 13, demanding implementation of the federally agreed salary structure for health workers. The doctors claim they are the lowest paid within Nigeria.

The state chairman of the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Dr. Enang Ofem, has said if the doctors' grievances are not resolved, the Association of Resident Doctors and the Medical and Dental Consultants Association would come out in support of the striking doctors.

The resident doctors and consultants are employed by the federal government.

Zambia council workers strike

Workers employed by Mansa Municipal Council in Luapula province have begun strike action and barricaded the town clerk's office.

They are taking the action after not being paid their wages for the last two years. They are demanding the town clerk, the current acting town clerk and the HR management team resign.



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