

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

18 November 2011

German steelworkers in warning strikes over pay demand

Up to 75,000 steelworkers were involved in two-hour warning strikes in North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony and Bremen this week in support of demands to raise pay by 7 percent.

Among the workers' other demands are that trainees be given permanent status, and that older employees be given the chance to work part-time. Negotiations will continue on November 21 in Düsseldorf, according to the web site of the International Metalworkers Federation.

At ThyssenKrupp Nirosta in Dillenburg on November 10, around 12,000 steelworkers stopped work for the second warning strike. Steel production was also stopped in Bremen, Gelsenkirchen, Salzgitter, Peine, Bochum, Ennepetal, Hagen, Remscheid, Siegen and Dillenburg.

In Bremen 1,200 workers at ArcelorMittal GmbH stopped work for two hours, and in Bochum 2,000 gathered, in the largest demonstration in front of the gates of ThyssenKrupp Steel Europe AG.

On November 14 in Mühlheim, workers at Vallourec & Mannesmann, the Pipe works of Mannesmann, Europipe and the Foundry of Friedrich-Wilhelm stopped work for two hours. On November 15, employees in Vallourec & Mannesmann in Düsseldorf-Rath stopped work. Further actions are expected in Schmolz-Bickenbach at Herzogenrath Kohlscheid.

Anti-austerity strike paralyses Portuguese public transport

On November 8, a strike in protest at the government's austerity measures—including cuts affecting the pay of public workers and the public transport sector—partially paralysed public transport across the country.

According to *New Europe*, rail traffic and the Lisbon underground were at a virtual standstill, causing long traffic jams on inroads to the capital. The strike also affected buses and ferry transport across the River Tagus.

Workers shouted and carried banners reading, "No to stealing wages", "Yes to work, no to joblessness", according to AFP.

The government is implementing massive spending cuts at the behest of the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. The strike took place when the representatives of the EU, IMF and the European Central Bank were in the capital to assess whether the cuts were sufficiently harsh enough to enable Portugal to receive a third tranche of loans.

The government intends to trim the budget deficit from 9.8 percent of gross domestic product in 2010 to 4.5 percent in 2012.

Finnish IT strike

The *Helsinki Times* reported November 11, "Finland's Federation of Special Service and Clerical Employees (Erto) and Union Pro launched industrial action in five large information technology companies on Friday."

Another strike by the Federation of Professional and Managerial Staff and the Association of Information Technology Industry Employees ended in a deal on Wednesday.

Two dead as Egyptian military clashes with protesting factory workers

Large-scale clashes between protesters and police left two people dead and three injured at the Canadian-Egyptian fertilisers company, Mobco-Agrium, in Damietta governorate on November 13, reported *Ahram Online*.

Opposition developed to the government's failure to relocate the controversial Mobco factory out of Damietta port. Protesters were confronted by police and clashes erupted around dawn.

"The police and army killed Islam Abdallah, I have just seen his body after he was killed", eyewitness Ahmed Omar told *Ahram Online*.

"The police and army attacked fiercely without making any attempts to negotiate with the protesters", added Omar. "Around 20,000 people are in the streets now protesting against what is happening.

"The city is at a standstill, the roads are entirely blocked. We want our voice to be heard, we want the Egyptian media to focus on our issue and complaints."

Protesters say the pollution produced by the factory affects meat, plant and fish supplies in the city. The army briefly managed to open the roads but protesters swiftly blocked them again. Eyewitnesses said the demonstrations called for further support from Damietta residents through loudspeakers.

The Damietta protest started last week during the Islamic El-Adha feast when hundreds of people staged a sit-in for three days, shutting down the city's harbour in the process.

Tear gas was reportedly used by the military in large amounts, a local resident told *Bikyamasr.com*, adding that "it is hard to understand what is happening. Too much violence. I don't understand, isn't this what the revolution was supposed to bring us, the freedom."

Israeli doctors strike at Haifa's Rambam Medical Centre

Doctors at Haifa's Rambam Medical Centre went on strike November 16, in response to a Health Ministry instruction to sack 10 senior doctors. The doctors had tendered their resignation as part of the mass resignation of senior doctors on Tuesday, out of which 31 were doctors working at Rambam, reported *Ha'aretz*.

Rambam hospital management refused to fire the doctors, saying, "immediately firing these doctors would cause great harm to patients. The management of Rambam, out of consideration for the good of the patients, cannot carry out the instructions of the Health Ministry."

Ha'aretz said "the strike, decided at a meeting of hundreds of members of staff at Rambam on Wednesday morning, was due to end at 10 a.m., after which the hospital was to return to normal operations. The hospital was to shut down for all but emergency procedures during the strike.

"Health Ministry Director General Roni Gamzu visited Rambam on Tuesday evening and asked the senior doctors to withdraw their letters of resignation. According to the ministry, the doctors firmly refused."

Hundreds of medical students employed in hospitals across Israel initiated a solidarity strike earlier Tuesday.

Namibian gold miners strike

Workers at the Lewcor gold mine, Navachab, in the Erongo region of Namibia have gone on strike after rejecting a wage rise of just 50 cents. The workers are currently on N\$7.50 (\$0.90) and N\$8 (\$1) per hour.

The Lewcor workers are employed as contractors at the mine. They only earn around N\$3,000 (\$360) a month despite doing the same work as machine operators employed directly by the mine who earn N\$8,000 (\$980) a month.

Among other grievances are underpayment, heavy taxes, no house or medical allowances and the workers accuse the company of not adhering to safety regulations.

Coca Cola workers stop production in South Africa

A strike that began Monday by Coca Cola workers in all its facilities across nine provinces has brought production to a halt.

The members of the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) are on strike over several grievances, including wage differentials between the sites. Around 400 strikers at the Port Elizabeth bottling and distribution centre held a protest to push their demands.

Robben Island workers dispute to enter fourth week

The strike by staff at the Robben Island Museum is set to enter its fourth week. They are demanding a pay increase of R3500 (\$440) a month and for the closure of the museum over the Christmas and New Year period so they can spend time with their families.

The workers have begun leafleting visitors to the museum asking for their support in the dispute by abandoning their trip.

National Health and Allied Workers' Union spokesman Luthando Nogcinisa told the press, "The strike could be resolved quite easily only if management were to come with an offer that we could sell to our members."

Strike by Zimbabwean municipal workers

A strike by municipal workers in Gweru began at the end of last week. Gweru is Zimbabwe's third largest city and lies in the centre of the country. Manual workers responsible for collecting garbage and cleaning public toilets went on strike to demand protective clothing to carry out their duties.

The members of the Zimbabwe Urban Council Workers Union first approached the National Social Security Agency in their bid to be supplied protective clothing. When that failed to bear fruit they took strike action.

Their action has led to uncollected garbage building up in the city centre.

Kenyan ferry workers in go-slow

Workers at Kenya Ferry Services (KFS) are taking go-slow action in an effort to be allowed to join the Dock Workers Union. They have now issued a three-week notice of strike action in pursuit of their demand.

The Mombasa and Coast Tourist Association has called on KFS to quickly resolve the dispute, fearing a strike would hit tourism hard.

Kenyan university lecturers strike enters second week

The strike by lecturers in Kenya's seven universities has now entered its second week. Initially 7,000 lecturers were involved, affecting 170,000 students. However, lecturers at Maseno University returned to work on Friday after meeting with management.

The lecturers are demanding the government implement the 2010/2012 collective bargaining agreement and are also protesting inadequate facilities, such as Internet access and lack of basic furniture.

Education minister Margaret Kamar has said there are no funds to meet the lecturers' demands due to the cost of financing Kenya's incursion into Somalia.

Nigerian power workers strike

Workers in the National Unions of Electricity Employees (NUEE) working for the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) began a strike Monday in protest at the company's failure to pay an agreed 50 percent salary increase. They are also protesting the proposed privatisation of the company. PHCN supplies electric power for domestic and industrial use.

The government has labelled the strike illegal and has brought in troops to man the power stations, bogusly claiming that they are at risk of terrorist attacks. The State Security Service (SSS) invited two NUEE officials to its offices in Abuja on Wednesday to discuss the strike.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact