

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

27 January 2012

Fiat's Italian plants stop production due to truck drivers strike

On January 24, Fiat's factories stopped production as a result of a national strike by truck drivers against a new government tax that has increased fuel prices.

The factories of Pomigliano, Cassino, Melfi, Mirafiori and Sevel Val di Sangro "stopped this morning and will remain shut this afternoon due to a lack of components caused by the truck strike," a Fiat spokesman told news service AFP.

The truck drivers' strike, which paralysed Sicily last week, caused major disruptions across Italy.

"The truck drivers' strike clogged highways and blocked ports in 60 locations, preventing goods from being delivered across the country," said the *Epoch Times*.

Dispute at Italian iron and coke plant

Workers at steelmaker Lucchini's Ferriera Servola iron and coke producing unit in Trieste, in the north-east of the country, went on a one-day strike January 24 to protest against plans to close the plant.

According to a *Reuters* report, Lucchini Group, controlled by Alexei Mordashov, the majority stakeholder of Russian steel maker Severstal, has announced a possible halt to production at the Trieste plant from February 1 as it is owed an unpaid bill of around €45 million (\$58.71 million).

Primark Northern Ireland staff ballot over pay freeze

Workers at the clothes retailer, Primark, in Northern Ireland, are being balloted on possible industrial action over the imposition of a pay freeze for the second year in succession. It follows consultations in December in which 95 percent of respondents were in favour of holding a ballot for action.

"In 2010, USDAW members very reluctantly agreed to accept a pay freeze following lengthy negotiations that involved the Labour Relations Agency (LRA). In this year's pay round, Primark has again refused to offer staff any pay rise and talks again aided by the LRA have so far failed to secure any agreement," said the a statement on the union web site.

Most staff at Primark Northern Ireland are currently paid just £6.84 an hour. Primark made a profit of £309 million in 2011.

Teachers at UK school strike over plans to turn it into an academy

Teachers at Montgomery Primary School, Sparkbrook, in Birmingham have gone on strike for a second time over plans to turn the school into an academy.

Teachers at the school last took industrial action in December.

According to the BBC, governors at the school have backed proposals to remove it from local authority control and seek an external private sponsor. A 300-name petition of parents against the academy proposal was handed in January 23. Around 60 staff and parents also manned picket lines outside the school, according to the NASUWT teaching union.

In the government school inspectorate Ofsted's latest report in 2009, Montgomery primary was rated as "satisfactory." The 200 poorest-performing schools in the country are being compelled by the Education Secretary Michael Gove to seek academy status.

National strike and rallies across Norway

About 150,000 transport workers gathered in rallies across the country last week from Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim to Kristiansand, Stavanger and Haugesund to oppose a new European temporary workers' directive.

"The directive could strip away employment rights that are enshrined in Norwegian law," said the web site of the International Transport Workers' Federation.

Transport workers went on a national strike January 18 against the government's plan to adopt the European Union Temporary and Agency Workers Directive.

Power plant workers in Serbia in pay strike

Around 660 shift workers are on strike to demand an increase of base salaries of 13 percent at the Nikola Tesla Power Plant (TENT) in Obrenovac, near Belgrade.

On January 18, the workers blocked the administrative premises of the power plant. TENT currently accounts for 60 percent of the state-run power company EPS's electricity production, and is the largest producer in the sector. It employs 2,300 workers.

Cypriot electricity workers' anti-privatization strike

On January 19, electricity workers began an indefinite strike over the plans to privatize the state-owned utility KIBTEK. The action took out around 50 percent of the grid in the north of the country, affecting tens of thousands of homes.

Authorities declared the strike illegal at KIBTEK, but workers continued their indefinite strike.

On January 21, telecommunication workers who had begun industrial action the same day as the electricity workers, said they would be returning to work after the authorities declared their strike illegal. The *Cyprus Mail*, reported January 21 on how workers from Turkey were being brought in by the government to break the power strike. "Turkish electricity workers were flown into the north yesterday in a frantic effort to restore power after local workers called an all-out indefinite strike on Thursday," said the paper.

Cypriot dockers take industrial action at ports over collective agreements

On February 1, porters and dockworkers are to stage a 24-hour strike at Larnaca and Limassol ports against staff complaints that the Cyprus Port Authority (CPA) and the Limassol Licensed Porters Association (LLPA) are violating their collective agreements of employment.

Port workers are calling for a pay rise and Cost of Living Allowance (CoLA)—calculated around seven percent—which are provided according to the collective agreements dating back to February 2011. The current strike follows last week's one-hour strike by the port workers.

The *Cyprus Mail* said: "Port authorities claim that with traffic at ports at low levels, workers might have to be let off, let alone get a pay rise and CoLA."

Strikes, sit-ins, protests across Egypt

Strikes, sit-ins and other protests are taking place across Egypt, one year on from the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak. "Many Egyptian governorates witnessed protests demanding better living conditions, better work conditions, and purging companies of corruption on Thursday.

"In Sadat City, Monufiya governorate, a workers' sit-in at Ezz Steel Company continued for the third day. Demonstrators are demanding raises as their salaries have not exceeded LE1200 per month for the last 15 years," reported *Al-Masry Al-Youm*.

News sources also reported that 450 workers, in South Sinai, from the Egyptian Maintenance Company, which is affiliated with the Petroleum Ministry, started a hunger strike to demand permanent contracts for all temporary workers in the company.

Workers at the Mediterranean Textile Company in the Borg el-Arab city of Alexandria took industrial action in protest of the company's management policies, including the "non-dispersal of profits."

Over 500 workers from Dib Egypt Textile Company blocked Cairo's Ring Road protesting their dismissal. Workers from the Irrigation Directorate blocked Nile Street in Minya to demand permanent work contracts. They threatened to block the railroad.

According to *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, "Engineers and workers at the Dar al-Tahrir Printing Press organized a sit-in to demand late payments. As a result, Al-Gomhurriya and Al-Dostour newspapers were not printed. Some 49 journalists at Al-Massaia newspaper organized a sit-in at the

Supreme Council for Journalism in downtown Cairo, to protest the newspaper's refusal to give them permanent contracts."

East Delta Electricity Production Company workers in Ismailia continued their sit-in demanding that the head of the holding company enforce a decision that had been made regarding the workers' jobs.

Al-Masry Al-Youm continued, "In Damietta, demonstrators from a village in Farskor blocked the agricultural road leading to Mansoura, the capital of Al-Daqahlia governorate in protest of the government's inaction toward acts of thuggery... In Sharqiya, security forces are intensifying negotiations with villagers who have blocked a road for three days in protest of deteriorating security conditions and the kidnapping of two quarry workers. The villagers are also protesting the imposition of tributes on agricultural land."

Thousands of workers demanding social justice joined a march on parliament at its opening session January 23.

Ahram Online reported January 19, "A group of temporary Al-Azhar teachers have cut the Salah Salem highway in Cairo and besieged Al-Azhar headquarters demanding to be appointed permanently. The protesters also demand bonuses and other incentives.

"There are about 70,000 teachers appointed temporarily in Al-Azhar. They demand permanent contracts akin to teachers in the Ministry of Education."

Last week hundreds of Al-Azhar teachers protested at Al-Azhar's headquarters.

Kenya: Lawyer claims workers forced to work at gunpoint

A lawyer representing workers at the East Africa Portland Cement Company (EAPCC) has claimed in a court hearing that police are forcing employees to work at gunpoint and to operate machinery. The workers at the EAPCC had recently confronted police who had accompanied the company's suspended Managing Director Kephart Tande when he went to the factory in an attempt to be reinstated. He had obtained a court order saying he should be reinstated along with three other board members.

The board members were suspended on the orders of Industrialisation Minister Amason Kingi, following a Kenyan National Audit Office investigation which questioned expenditure claims by the board members. A lawyer for Kingi speaking at the court hearing, said workers at EAPCC had disrupted operations at the cement factory to protest the reinstatement of Tande and the Board Chairman Ole Karbolo.

On Thursday the court is due to hear an application from Kingi for a forensic audit of the company and the court order suspending the board members to be reinstated.

Senegal: Transport workers strike

Public transport workers represented by the National Union of Senegalese Road Transporters began a three day general strike on Tuesday to protest high fuel prices and police harassment. The union claims near unanimous national support for the strike. Transport workers held a two-day general strike earlier this month.

Tanzanian doctors give notice of strike

Doctors working in Tanzanian public hospitals gave notice of strike action to begin next Monday. Two hundred doctors meeting in Dar es Salaam on Monday announced their intention to strike.

The doctors are asking for a pay increase in line with growing inflation, for health insurance to be provided, an improvement in working conditions and facilities and for 194 intern doctors at Muhimbili National Hospital to be reinstated. The 194 interns had been transferred to other hospitals after they had stopped work to press their demand that their two months of arrears of allowance be paid.

Morocco: Unemployed graduates set themselves on fire

Last week five unemployed graduates set themselves on fire protesting the death of jobs. Unemployment in Morocco is around 9 percent, but for graduates this rises to 16 percent. The five were part of the unemployed graduate movement, a loose nationwide collection of associations.

One-hundred-sixty unemployed graduates had been occupying the Ministry of Education in Rabat for the last two weeks. Supporters had been supplying them with food. However, last week, police surrounded the building to prevent supporters supplying them with food. The five demonstrators set fire to themselves to oppose the police action. Three of the demonstrators were hospitalized following their action with severe burns.

Last Thursday, around 1,000 unemployed graduates picketed parliament as the new government laid out its economic plans.

Malawi lawyers march in support of striking court workers

On Monday around 35 lawyers, members of the Malawi Law Society, marched to the high court in Lilongwe to show support for junior judiciary workers who have been on strike since January 9. The judiciary workers began their strike to protest the non-implementation of terms and conditions that had been agreed by the government.

Ghanaian academics strike

Lecturers in the Teachers and Educational Workers Union at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology began a strike on Monday.

The lecturers have been put on the recently agreed Single Spine Salary Structure (SSSS). As a result of being put on the SSSS the lecturers were expected to be paid 20 months backdated pay as part of the deal, and went on strike to protest delays in paying the arrears.

South African platinum miners' strike

Around 5,000 rock drill operators at the Impala Platinum mine at Rustenburg were threatened with dismissal if they did not return to work by Tuesday 24 January, after a court order deemed their strike illegal.

The rock drill operators are striking to oppose being left out of an

agreement to pay an improved amount above the nationally agreed two-year deal with the National Union of Mineworkers last October. The company, which employs nearly 50,000 workers, agreed to the additional payment in an attempt to retain miners.

Zimbabwe: council workers strike

Workers employed by Karoi Town Council went on strike this week following non-payment of arrears of salaries. They have not been paid since November. They are also protesting the non-payment of bereavement allowances to relatives of council workers who have died.

Zimbabwean public sector workers strike

Public sector workers were due to start a five-day strike this week in support of their demand for a minimum monthly salary of \$538. Currently public sector workers earn between \$250 and \$350 a month. Public sector workers include teachers.

Press reports paint a mixed response to the call for strike action, with reports of government departments operating normally, but schools in the Zimbabwean capital Harare are being deserted.



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