Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Europe

UK maintenance workers at Shell's research centre strike over pay deal

Maintenance workers at Shell Thornton Research Centre in Cheshire, England are to take industrial action over the Christmas period against their employer, Eurest Support Services—part of the worldwide Compass Group—attempting to renege on a two-year-old pay deal. According to the Unite union web site, "Workers have also expressed their concern about Shell leaving the site within the next year and urge their employer to delay any potential redundancies to ensure that staff will have the right to TUPE transfer."

Rail signallers' strike in North London over job losses

London rail workers went on strike Wednesday over Network Rail's "unacceptable plans" to halve the number of key signalling staff working at West Hampstead.

The strike follows a 100 percent vote in favour of industrial action in a ballot.

The West Hampstead box controls traffic in and out of St Pancras International.

Bus strike on Isle of Man over cuts to wages

Around 100 bus drivers, employed by government-owned Bus Vannin, were on a three-day strike this week, in a long-running dispute over the Manx government's attempts to slash drivers' wages by up to £3,000 a year.

Drivers in the Unite union voted 90 percent to take industrial action over increased driving time and the reduction of contractual hours from 42 to 37.

Thousands of workers strike at Bulgaria's largest military plant

Thousands of workers at the country's largest military plant, the state-owned VMZ Sopot in central Bulgaria, staged three days of industrial action last week.

The demonstrators are holding a protest march in the town of Sopot, where the plant is located.

The workers are protesting the constant delays in receiving their wages and for better working conditions in the winter.

Staff vote for industrial action at Shannon Development

Staff at Shannon Development have balloted for industrial action by an overwhelming majority in response to the failure of management to provide assurances to the workforce following the government decision to break up the agency.

Dispute at Italy's La Scala cancels performance

The La Scala opera house in Milan was forced to cancel the opening night the Romeo and Juliet ballet performance after the chorus went on strike Wednesday.

The 74 chorus members had protested demands that they should appear on stage in costume, rather than sing hidden from view as usual. There were also reports that they had been required to perform dance moves along with ballerinas.

The choristers had demanded special payments for the requests, which was rejected by management.

Ballerinas had also threatened to strike after they complained

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that a sloping platform being used in the performance was causing them back pain, but withdrew their threat.

Middle East

Strike at Israeli mobile phone company as management refuses contract

Workers entered the second week of their strike at the Israeli mobile phone company Pelephone after management refused to enter into negotiations on a contract.

On Monday, the workers demonstrated outside the company headquarters. One slogan read, “At Pelephone, there’s no one to talk to” . Africa

Local government workers in Plateau state, Nigeria on strike for seven months

Local government workers in Plateau state have been on strike for seven months demanding that the authority pays the nationally agreed minimum wage of 18,000 naira per month. The strike was called by the National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) in Plateau State.

Since the national minimum wage became law some states have paid the increase in full, whilst others including Plateau have not, claiming that they do not have sufficient funds.

Plateau state government said it can pay only 55 percent of the wage and promised to begin full payment at some unspecified future date, claiming that “expenditure on security was eating deep into its finances”.

Emotions amongst the strikers are running very high. It is alleged that on December 13 some of the striking workers attacked two of the state government’s top officers in the premises of the State House of Assembly as Governor Jonah David Jang prepared to present the state’s 2013 budget proposals.

On December 17 the *Guardian*, Nigeria, reported a statement from the NLC leadership that “government had deployed armed security men and thugs to unleash unprecedented harassment and violence on the striking workers. The police who used tear gas indiscriminately on the workers also fired one at the Our Lady of Apostles’ (OLA) Hospital in Jos, the development which drew the ire of the management of the hospital.”

In an attempt to retain credibility with the strikers, the leadership of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) called on all affiliates and state councils to begin mobilisation for the three-day strike to begin on December 20 and then “await a further directive”. They also directed “all state councils across the country to organise prayer sessions against the dictatorship of the governor of Plateau state and all those standing against the implementation of the new minimum wage.” As the WSWS went to press there was no evidence that the national industrial action was taking place.

The action in Plateau state has paralyzed a number of commercial activities. Junior schools have been closed since May.

Shoprite supermarket workers on strike in Mozambique

Some 150 shop workers at the Shoprite supermarket in Maputo have been on strike since December 12 to demand a pay rise, better working hours and better conditions of work.

The strikers stress that they will not return to work until their employers agree to serious negotiations.

Strikers’ representatives told the media that the workers receive a minimum wage of 3,500 new metical (US$118) a month. They are demanding a pay increase of between 15 and 18 percent. According to a report in *Agencia de Informacao de Mocambique*, wage negotiations have dragged on since 2004 when the workers first presented the company with a list of grievances. It was not until September 2012 that workers raised the possibility of strike action.

Shoprite is a South African supermarket chain. The strike is hitting its sales at the busiest time of the year.

Ugandan doctors and nurses on strike over unpaid salaries

Doctors and nurses went on strike this week at Mulago hospital, Uganda, one of the largest hospitals in the country. They were protesting against the delay in payment of their November salaries.

Health workers at Kabale hospital (also in Uganda) held a protest earlier this month to demand payment of their salaries for August and October.

The *Independent* (Kampala) pointed out that the national budget was reduced by 25 percent when donors pulled out of their obligation to provide aid to the country.

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