

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

11 January 2013

Thousands strike at Bulgaria's largest military plant

Wednesday saw a strike at Bulgaria's largest military plant, the state-owned VMZ Sopot, over constant wage payment delays and demands for better working conditions in the winter.

The workforce first held a warning strike in November, which led to the signing of an agreement between the plant and the unions providing for the payments of delayed wages by the end of the month. The full pay was not forthcoming, and the workers have staged a series of strikes since mid-December.

The Sofia news agency *novinite.com* wrote this week: "On Monday, Economy and Energy Minister, Delyan Dobrev, pledged the Council of Minister would issue ASAP a decision about the privatisation of the plant.

"The only approved company will submit its bid and financial guarantees to the Privatisation Agency by January 11, and they will be presented before the Economy and Energy Ministry by January 15."

VMZ Sopot's military production includes anti-tank guided and unguided missiles, aviation unguided missiles, artillery ammunition, and fuses, and its civilian products include diamond tools, abrasive discs and grinding wheels, gas cylinders, food industry equipment, and household appliances.

In 2007, the country's Privatisation Agency started to sell some of the plant's assets to cover part of its debts.

During the Stalinist period, Bulgaria was the third COMECON member state specialising in the defence industry, along with the former USSR and the former Czechoslovakia.

Postal workers at the Bristol depot, England, to strike

More than a hundred postal workers at the Brislington depot in Bristol are threatening to strike over workload and bullying in their office.

The workers have already held two previous days of action.

Staff at France's number-two bank hold one-day national strike

Workers at Societe Generale SA held a one-day national strike Tuesday to protect jobs at the bank over its cost-cutting plans.

The Paris-based bank is France's second largest. It announced plans

in September 2011 to accelerate asset disposals, and launched a cost-cutting programme aimed at freeing €4 billion (US\$5.22 billion) in capital by 2013. The bank cut 880 jobs in France last year as part of its restructuring plan.

Guernsey bus drivers could take action over rota changes

Public bus drivers in Guernsey, UK, could strike over changes to their rotas made by operator CT Plus.

The company took over the running of the island's scheduled and school bus services in March.

UK: London subway drivers to strike over passenger safety checks

A statement posted on the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) union web site January 4 reports a "substantial ballot in favour of taking industrial action over London Underground's removal of detainment staff, leaving Bakerloo and Central Line drivers to take trains into depots and sidings without staff on hand physically checking that all passengers are off the train...."

The strike began yesterday until further notice. The ballot followed a series of incidents of passengers being taken on board trains into the secure sidings areas, "culminating in the case of a young boy attempting to jump from a train onto an area of live track, and where a potential fatality was only avoided through the swift intervention of a driver," according to the RMT statement.

Republic of Ireland: More than a thousand workers could strike at Bus Eireann

Over 1,000 staff have served notice of industrial action on Bus Eireann if the company pushes through a cost-cutting plan.

According to the *Irish Independent*, a ballot of members of the National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU) backed a potential strike by 92 percent.

The smaller Transport Salaried Staffs Association also voted by 73 percent for industrial action.

The cuts planned by the transport company are part of a €9 million payroll savings plan as the firm predicts losses of €16 million this year.

Estonian energy workers could strike over wage dispute

The workforce at Narva Power Plants in northeastern Estonia are preparing for a strike over a wage dispute, according to a statement from the head of the Narva Energia union. Talks to enter into a collective agreement, started in December, have broken down. Power plant workers staged a solidarity strike last March in support of teachers. Narva Power Plants employs over 700 workers.

Iranian steel workers strike

The Free Union of Iranian Workers has reported that Safa Rolling Pipe factory workers in the city of Saveh have resumed with their strike over six months back wages.

Around 1,200 steel workers went on a four-hour strike December 29.

The workers ended their action when management's promised to pay one month of their back wages. When the assurances were not honoured, the workers took their protests to the governor's offices the following day.

On December 31, the strike continued with the workers setting tires on fire and closing the gates of the plant. Around 250 engineers and skilled personnel at the factory joined the strike on the fourth day, closing the plant gates again.

The *Iran Labor Report* states that on the eighth day of the strike, Rostami Safa, the owner, promised workers that their demands would be met and urged an end to the strike. In a two-and-a-half-hour meeting with the workers' representatives, he pledged to pay August-November wages in February, with December and January wages to be paid in March, along with yearly bonuses. Safa said February and March wages would follow later.

The workers decided to continue the strike.

Mozambican doctors embark on five-day strike

Doctors in Mozambique began a five-day strike on Monday. They are demanding a basic wage of US\$3,000 a month, spurning the government offer of US\$1,200. The doctors are represented by the Mozambican Medical Association (AMM).

The Ministry of Health has declared the strike illegal, on the basis that the AMM is a professional body rather than a trade union. Public sector workers are prohibited from striking under Mozambican law. The ministry threatened to dock pay of striking doctors.

Mozambique, one of the world's poorest countries, has only one doctor for every 22,000 inhabitants. The doctors have pledged to provide an emergency service during the strike.

Kenyan nurses' union calls off strike

Lawyers representing officials of the of the unregistered Kenya National Union of Nurses (KNUN) agreed at an Industrial Court hearing in Nairobi this week to end the month-long strike, after it was declared illegal. The nurses belonging to KNUN went on strike following the Registrar of Trade Unions refusal to register KNUN as a trade union.

The attorney general representing the government promised to address the issue of victimisation and threats made against some of the striking nurses.

Togo public sector workers threaten strike

Around 50,000 Togolese public sector workers represented by six trade unions are threatening strike action. This follows the government's adoption of the 2013 finance bill, which did not include a new public service bill being promoted by the unions. This public service bill, the unions hoped, would have addressed low salaries and poor working conditions.

Press releases sent out by the various unions called on the government to address their concerns to avoid strike action.

Zimbabwean teachers strike threat

The leader of the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ), Takavafira Zhou, has given a 10-day notice of strike action if January pay packets do not match up to its demands.

PTUZ has been pushing for a minimum US\$500 a month salary for all teachers. Currently, the lowest paid teachers earn US\$280 a month. The union is demanding the government use money raised from the sale of diamonds from the Chiadzwa diamond fields in Manicaland to fund their pay.



To contact the WWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact