

# 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.

## EasyJet profit hoarding triggers strike by French pilots

The French pilots' union SNPL called a one-day strike Monday against British budget airline easyJet.

It has accused easyJet of not sharing record profits with employees. EasyJet announced last week that pre-tax profits rose 51 percent in the financial year to September. The airline said it would pay a £175 million special dividend to shareholders. Shares of easyJet have doubled over the last year.

Flights by easyJet operate out of 16 French airports. EasyJet is Europe's second-largest low-cost carrier after Ryanair Holdings.

## Five-day wildcat public transport strike in Genoa ends

A five-day strike by bus workers in Genoa—Italy's sixth-largest city—ended last Saturday.

The strike began November 19, while the city council was discussing a bill, passed two days later, pledging to restructure loss-making local services. Around 2,400 workers took to the streets fearing privatization.

The agreement between unions and local authorities that ended the strike ruled out wage cuts and partly relied on European Union funds to plug budget shortfalls.

Junior Transport Minister Erasmo D'Angelis said last week that over 40 percent of local transport companies were "technically insolvent, dead."

Rome alone has debts totalling €1.6 billion.

## Workers at Amazon Germany strike in ongoing pay dispute

Hundreds of workers at two Amazon distribution centres in Leipzig and Bad Hersfeld staged a one-day warning strike Monday in the latest in a series to demand a collective wage agreement to meet pay standards in the retail sector.

"We can't rule out further strikes over the next weeks," Verdi union spokeswoman Christiane Scheller told the *Guardian*.

"Whether it comes to further strikes during the upcoming Christmas period lies entirely in Amazon's hands," said Verdi union secretary Mechthild Middecke in a statement. "The second Amazon agrees to

negotiations, we'll sit down at the table."

Amazon has confirmed it will soon be opening three new distribution centres in Poland, raising the prospect of outsourcing jobs further east.

## Greek health workers strike

Doctors with the National Organisation for the Provision of Healthcare Services (EOPYY)—the unified healthcare branch of the main Greek social insurance funds—staged rolling 24-hour strikes nationwide from Monday to Wednesday against EOPYY doctors' inclusion in public-sector staff mobility programmes, which may also lead to dismissal.

In addition to doctors, other staff at EOPYY decided to hold a 48-hour strike on Tuesday and Wednesday and take part in a protest rally outside the health ministry on Tuesday morning.

The National Medical Association says that the firing of EOPYY doctors will lead to greater hardship for millions insured with EOPYY and mean they are unable to have access to services they need, while many will be forced to discontinue treatment for their ailments.

## Bulgarian protests

Around 4,000 workers protested November 20 against low wages and a lack of jobs.

Last Wednesday was also the 160th consecutive day of protests, which were triggered by a controversial cabinet nomination in June. Protesters marched through the Bulgarian capital, Sofia, to demand a 10 percent increase in public sector wages and reforms in the inefficient and corruption-prone healthcare and energy sectors.

The government has faced almost daily protests since taking office in May.

## Workers at Liebherr Ireland picket Kerry plant

Workers at the Liebherr Ireland container crane factory in Killarney picketed the premises on Wednesday morning in a dispute over a retrospective pay increase.

Notice had been served on the company 14 days previously of "a suite of industrial action", including a ban on overtime and work stoppages by union members, according to a Siptu union spokeswoman.

The plant is Kerry's largest industrial employer. The workers say they

are owed the 2.5 percent increase since 2009. The company has said it will enter talks on increases from 2014 only.

### **Norwegian oil workers cut back their hours**

Onshore and offshore oil workers cut back their hours last week to protest wage rates.

Around 1,400 workers of contractors Kaefer, Bilfinger and Beerenberg in charge of insulation and maintenance work are working about 45 percent of their normal hours after failing to come to an agreement with employers over their pay, Upstream reported.

Union leader Hilde-Marit Rysst said platforms needing modification work would be the first to be affected by the slowdown in worker hours. The action may also impact crude oil and gas output in Norway, which is the largest producer of fuels for Europe.

### **Thousands protest austerity in Madrid**

Thousands took to the streets of Madrid Saturday to protest against austerity policies and the ruling People's Party.

Members of Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and Union General de Trabajadores (UGT) unions joined by health and education workers marched through the capital, chanting slogans and holding placards supporting the public services.

Changes in health provisions include excluding unofficial migrant workers from accessing free health services and increasing patient payments for extra treatments such as drugs, prosthetics and some ambulance trips.

### **Protesting teachers face police crackdown**

Hundreds of teachers faced a police crackdown Saturday as they joined in a march in Ankara, Turkey to protest the government's policies on education on the occasion of Teachers' Day, according to the *Hurriyet Daily*.

Riot police, tear gas and water cannons were employed against the teachers. Seven protesters were injured, with a female teacher receiving a head injury from a gas canister fired by the police.

### **Thousands of workers at Egyptian Iron and Steel Company stage sit-in**

Thousands of workers from the Iron and Steel Company—one of Egypt's largest public companies—in Helwan in South Cairo started a sit-in on Tuesday demanding profit shares.

"Our sit-in will continue until the company issues an official statement with a date for payment," said a worker.

Fellow worker Youssef Rashwan said his colleagues will not strike, as the cost of shutting down the blast furnace is very high.

The general assembly of the company allocated 16-months profit shares

to their 11,969 workers, which they were expecting to receive in November.

The workers are demanding the dismissal of the CEO and the president of the Holding Company for Metallurgic Industries. They have requested that the government invest more in the modernisation of the company.

Company losses jumped from LE311.5 million (\$44 million) in 2012 to LE676 million (\$95 million) this year.

### **Iran's Polyacryl workers protest**

Polyacryl workers started a second round of protests over job security on November 16 in Isfahan, reported *Iranian Labour News Agency* (ILNA).

More than 700 workers spent the night on November 18 at the factory mosque and joined with more co-workers. Around 1,000 workers continued their protest into the next day.

Polyacryl, founded 20 years ago, is a holding company specializing in polyester and acrylic cotton and fibre, employing 1,500 workers organized into ten separate subsidiaries. Management decided to divide the operations and break down the company, making some workers sign contracts with these subsidiaries. This led to concerns over job security, which resulted in the first protests on October 30, November 2, 3 and 5.

Protests resumed with gatherings in the factory compounds on November 17, 18, 19 and 20.

"In a 10 point letter, the workers called for stepping down of some of the board members of the company and a review of their action on the board. Return to work of those expelled due to their trade activities are also among the workers' demands. The company's Islamic Labor Council was shut down a year and a half ago and the activists associated with the Council were expelled from the company," reported the ILNA.

On November 21 daily protests at 7 to 8 am and 3 to 4 pm were announced. "On the same day," according to ILNA, "four Polyacryl workers, Javad Lotfi, Abbas Haghigh, Kioumars Rahimi and Ahmad Saberi were arrested and transferred to the city of Dastgerd, 13 kilometers north of Isfahan."

### **Israeli Hadera Paper workers in open-ended strike**

A strike involving 370 workers at Hadera Paper's central facility began Friday. The strike was launched over a demand for continued payment of a 4.5 percent bonus that has been paid annually.

The group of unionised employees constitute a small portion of the company's 3,000-strong workforce, but the stoppage has affected the company because of the key positions that the strikers hold. As a result of the strike, the plant has stopped producing both white paper and recycled paper.

The strikers oppose having their bonuses tied to the company's financial results, which management has been insisting on. The publicly traded company, which is controlled by Clal Industries, reported a third-quarter loss of NIS 61.2 million following two previous profitable quarters.

### **Libyan workers strike to oppose Islamist militia**

Workers in the East Libyan port city of Benghazi began a three-day strike Tuesday to oppose the actions of militia in the Benghazi region, which have led to deaths and created insecurity. On Monday clashes between Libyan army and Islamist militia forces left at least nine dead.

Oil workers, civil servants and private sector workers joined the strike, leading to the closure of schools, universities and shops. Benghazi and the surrounding area produce around 60 percent of Libya's oil. The ongoing clashes have severely curtailed Libya's oil production and exports.

#### **Namibia fishery workers threaten strike**

Negotiations between fishery company Novanam and the Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU) have reached stalemate and the union has threatened to strike. Fishery employees are seeking an 8.5 percent pay increase and that 200 of the 1,400 temporary workers employed for more than five years be made permanent. The employers have offered 5.8 percent.

Last week workers at Gendor Holdings, an affiliated company, went on strike, pressing for a wage increase and for long-term temporary workers to be made permanent.

#### **Namibian hotel workers strike**

Around 300 hotel workers, including waiters, receptionists and cooks, employed by the Hilton hotel in Windhoek went on strike Saturday. They are members of Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (Nafau) and are seeking additional benefits including bonuses and housing allowances. NAFAU branch organiser Ali Tjiposa accused the police of harassing pickets.

#### **Nigerian education ministry strike**

Senior civil servants working at the Federal Ministry of Education began a four-day strike on Tuesday. They are represented by the Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria. The decision to strike was taken following discussions between union representatives Monday. Among their demands is the payment of four years' promotion arrears.

#### **Liberian teachers strike threat**

Public school teachers in Liberia are threatening to strike if they are not paid salary arrears owed to them. Various government bodies including the Education Ministry have asked the teachers to give them two weeks grace to be able to sort out the problem with arrears. However the teachers have said they will only wait one week, after which they would begin nationwide strike action.

Around 300 teachers demonstrated outside the Ministry of Education Monday and clashed with private security guards.

#### **Zambian nurses strike**

Nurses and midwives at the Lusaka teaching hospital in Zambia came out on strike last Friday. They are demanding a 31 percent pay increase and that the disparities between their salaries and conditions and those of civil servants, who have recently been awarded a pay increase and improved conditions, be rectified. They are represented by the Zambia National Union of Nurses (ZNUN).

The government has drafted in nurses from the air force and army to cover for the striking nurses. Labour Minister Fackson Shamenda has denounced the strike as illegal and threatened dismissals.

ZNUN president Tom Yungana has also denounced the strike and told the nurses to return to work, saying their action was cutting across negotiations he was having with Labour Minister Shamenda.

#### **South Africa: Platinum miners' strike now in third week**

The strike by 7,000 miners working for Northam Platinum is now in its third week. The miners are represented by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) where as in other platinum mines they have been pushed out by the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU). The NUM is demanding a pay increase of up to 40 percent, while the company is offering between eight and nine percent.

Northam claims that it is losing R14 million (\$1.4 million) a day in production losses and may have to close down its operation. The miners have lost R30 million (\$3 million) in wages since the strike began.



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