

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.

Walk out by Italian air traffic control staff

Air traffic control staff in Italy walked out for four hours last Friday between 1 pm and 5 pm. Another four-hour strike is planned for February 17.

Hundreds of flights were cancelled across Europe due to the action, connected to long-standing protests against plans for the creation of a single European airspace with its expected impact on jobs.

Protest action by Dutch dockers

Dockers at the port of Rotterdam refused to unload a container ship on Sunday. In an apparent test operation, a vessel was loaded at the new Rotterdam Gateway Terminal (RWG) and then moved to the ECT (Europe Container Terminals) terminal where the dockers refused to unload it.

RWG has refused to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement with the FNV Havens union, which represents dockers. Other companies have agreed to negotiate. The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) supports their dispute. The port workers are concerned over the use of increased automation, which they fear will lead to job losses.

Dutch Brinks staff strike

Employees at the Dutch arm of the Brinks Company are on strike. They transport money to banks to fill ATM machines. Brinks is planning to cut 600 of the 1,000 staff, after the company lost its contract to fill cashpoint machines at Rabobank and ABN Amro banks.

German airline balloted for action

Cabin crew employed by German airline Lufthansa are being balloted on possible strike action. The 18,000 workers are represented by the UFO union. The issues include the level of workers' contributions to their

benefits and pursuit of an eight percent pay rise lodged last April. In spite of the ongoing ballot, the union has agreed to meet with Lufthansa management in February to attempt to resolve the issue.

Meanwhile, the separate dispute between Lufthansa and its pilots' union Vereinigung Cockpit (VC) has not been resolved. Pilots have so far taken strike action on 10 separate occasions in an attempt to retain their current retirement scheme that allows pilots to retire at 55 and receive 60 percent of their pay.

Demonstration in Macedonian capital in support of jailed journalist

A demonstration organised by the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (ZNM) and supported by Journalist and Media Workers Union (SSNM) and the International Federation of Journalists took place in Skopje on Tuesday. Around 3,000 supporters attended.

The demonstration was in support of jailed investigative journalist Tomislav Kezarovski who last week was given a two-year prison sentence for allegedly revealing the identity of a witness in a murder case.

Kezarovski attended the demonstration as he had been given temporary release from prison on health grounds, but is due to return to prison on February 18. He is a reporter with the *Nova Makedonija* daily paper and was under detention and then house arrest since May 2013 for an article he wrote in 2008.

An appeal court cut his original sentence to two years, but concurred with the original guilty verdict. ZNM President Naser Selmani stated, "The only fair decision by the Court of Appeal in Skopje was to dismiss all charges. Instead of taking into account the right of an innocent journalist who revealed abuse in the work of public institutions, it has decided to protect those who thought two years ago, that the imprisonment of a journalist in Macedonia could easily pass."

Polish miners call off action over pit closures

Miners working for the state-owned company Kompania Weglowa, which employs around 50,000 miners at 14 pits had taken strike action to protest government plans to close four of the mines. Their action involved underground and overground protests. Following talks between government and the unions last Saturday, the miners agreed to call off their action.

Under the agreement, 10 of the pits will be transferred to a revamped Kompania Weglowa to be called New KW. It was agreed that the four remaining pits originally slated for closure, Piekary, Brzeszcze, Centrum and Makoszowy, will be kept open but ownership will be transferred to

the state restructuring company SRK. Once restructured, which will undoubtedly involve job cuts and speed-ups, the mines will be offered for sale to the private sector. Few details of the deal have been made available, but miners will maintain their current salaries for one year while there will be bigger incentives for admin staff to take redundancy.

What is certain is that there will be further attacks on mining jobs and conditions in the coming period. Speaking to the press Janusz Steinhoff, formerly an economics minister, stated, "The programme which was negotiated with the unions absolutely does not give a guarantee of a profitable KW."

Northern Irish water union calls off action

Employees at state owned Northern Ireland Water called off their work to rule on Wednesday. The action, which began on December 22, involved more than 1,000 workers and was in response to the government plans to scrap the current pension scheme.

The action mainly affected the counties of Londonderry, Fermanagh and Tyrone and led to water cut offs for around 9,000 homes.

Members of the unions Nipsa, Unite and GMB will have to be balloted on the deal, details of which have not been released.

English health workers set to strike

Health workers in England represented by unions Unite, Unison, GMB and others are due to take 12 hours strike action next Thursday, January 29, from 9am to 9pm. This will be followed by a work to rule, to run until Tuesday February 24 followed by a 24-hour strike on Wednesday 25 February.

The action is in support of health workers' demands for the implementation of the one percent pay increase recommended by the National Health Service Pay Review Body, plus other demands.

Talks are taking place this week between the unions and Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt. Unison head of health, Christina McAnea, described the talks as "a welcome sign that we have at last got the chance to have these more serious and sensible discussions."

Ambulance service staff in England and Northern Ireland are due to take action over the same issue. They plan to begin a 48-hour strike at 12 noon on January 29.

Egyptian textile workers awaiting government promise

Textile workers employed by the Mahalla Holding Company for Spinning and Weaving returned to work last Saturday following four days' strike action. The 7,000 employees had come out on strike over non-payment of their annual bonuses. The government has promised they will receive their bonuses by Thursday of this week. Gehad Taman, one of the workers, told the press that if the government did not pay out, "None of the workers will stay silent this time."

Iranian miners protest non-payment of wages

Miners from the Koshk Mine in Bafgh, central Iran, demonstrated in Tehran last weekend protesting non-payment of wages arrears. In total 260 miners at the mine are owed two month's pay. Two months ago the miners went on strike for a week, demanding their three months' pay arrears. Following mediation by the local governor and the payment of one months' wages arrears they returned to work.

Protest by Gaza workers

Dozens of labourers held a demonstration outside the cabinet headquarters of the Palestinian Unity government in Gaza on Tuesday. They are members of the General Union of Workers and were protesting plans by the Unity government to cancel health insurance and development programmes for 80,000 workers.

Gaza civil servants strike

Civil servants employed by the former Hamas-run government held a one-day strike Tuesday. Thousands of public employees took part in the strike, with the exception of emergency workers on wards, intensive care units and blood banks. The strike was part of a protest against salaries being unpaid over the last eight months.

Mozambique miners continue strike

Mozambique miners at the Chirodzi coal mine in the western province of Tete are continuing their strike, which began January 9. It is the third strike at the mine since it opened in 2013. They are opposing squalid working conditions and the disproportionate rates of pay paid to Indian expatriates.

Mozambican workers will earn a net monthly wage of Meticaís 7,500 (\$240) whereas an ex-pat Indian worker will be paid more than Meticaís 35,000 (\$1,100) a month for doing the same job. The mine owner Jindal Mozambique Minerals is an Indian-owned company.

The 250 miners and associated workers say there is no provision of facemasks against coal dust, no provision of drinking water, electricity or toilet facilities. The workers are forced to drink untreated water and as a consequence they are suffering an outbreak of diarrhoeal diseases.

Tanzara rail staff forced back to work

Workers at the TANZARA Railway Company, jointly owned by Tanzania and Zambia governments, have been forced back to work by a court order although they have not been paid for six months. The company transports valuable copper resources across the African copper belt to the Mombasa port in Tanzania, besides providing passenger services.

The railway workers were said to be disappointed that the court had ordered them back to work, but had not ordered the company to pay their wages. Workers arrived on foot, late for work, because they had no money for bus fares. Although the strike that took place starting last week was

formally supported by Tanzanian Trade Union Congress, no supportive action was reported.

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South African platinum miners call off strike

The strike by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) at Northam Platinum, South Africa, which began January 13, has been called off. Workers returned to the mine on Tuesday.

Although the strike was caused by management breaching agreed conditions, the company was awarded an interdict declaring the strike unprotected. Around 2,000 of the workforce carried on the action, calling for the Chief Executive Officer to resign. The strike was called off by the NUM after signing a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Northam, although it is not clear what disciplinary action the wildcat strikers may face.

Zimbabwe parking attendants protest

Last week workers employed by Easipark Zimbabwe, which is responsible for parking bays in Harare, went on strike over the scrapping of their bonus payments. Easipark is a joint venture between Harare City Council and EasiHold of Zimbabwe. Easipark workers, represented by their workers committee, are appealing for the return to the bonus system that provided 10 percent of every dollar spent at the parking bays going to supplement their wage of \$290 a month.

The workers committee members have been suspended and barred from company premises or engaging with workers on the issue, and a breach of the conditions is regarded as an act of misconduct.

On Monday the suspended workers sought and were granted a meeting with the Harare town clerk, Dr Mahachi, who arranged for them to meet with Easipark management. The meeting between management and the workers' committee resolved that all the striking employees, including the 14 suspended workers, should return to work. While this meeting took place the striking parking attendants held a sit-in at the Harare central business district.

Nigerian teachers in Akwa Ibon state strike

Nigerian teachers in Akwa Ibom State went on strike Monday over non-payment of their salaries. The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) said that the teachers will not return to class until the state government implements agreements over pay made with the teachers.

Other outstanding issues include the non payment of promotion increases to the teachers since 2009, and the fact that primary school teachers have not been paid their leave grant since 2012. Alongside salaries for December not being paid, pensions and gratuities are outstanding.



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