

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

One day strike hits German and Italian Amazon distribution centres

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Europe

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

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Amazon workers at distribution centers in Germany and Italy held a strike on November 24, so-called Black Friday—traditionally the busiest shopping day of the year.

Around 2,000 German Amazon employees at six distribution centers across Germany walked out. The strike was part of an ongoing dispute.

German Amazon staff are seeking parity in pay and working conditions with other retail and mail order company employees. Amazon in Germany currently classes its employees, members of the Verdi union, as logistics staff and imposes pay and conditions in line with other German logistics companies.

As well as striking, several hundred employees marched through Berlin carrying placards reading “Block Black Friday” and “Make Amazon Pay.”

In Italy, around 500 permanent staff employed by Amazon at their distribution center near Piacenza in northern Italy struck on the same day, demanding a pay increase and against intolerable working conditions.

One worker, a picker who has to select the items to be dispatched, speaking to the *Il Manifesto* web site said: “You walk as much as 17 km in a day. You’re always on the move and you’re bending your back all the time. I have many co-workers with musculoskeletal disorders in the joints, but no one is able to obtain recognition of their occupational diseases because the company is putting off the medical visits for certification.”

They are represented by the UIL union. The role of the trade unions as facilitators of the exploitation imposed by Amazon was demonstrated in the Italian strike with the *Daily Mirror* reporting, “The unions advised workers who are on short-term, work-on-demand contracts to stay on the job, so they would not risk losing future gigs.”

UK nuclear plant staff strike

Around 3,000 staff at the nuclear processing plant Sellafield in northwest England held a 24-hour strike beginning 6am Wednesday.

The strike, the third in the current dispute, is in opposition to an imposed three-year below inflation pay rise of 1.5 percent. Also striking were around 300 catering staff employed at the site by the outsourcing company, Mitie.

On Thursday, fire fighting staff at Sellafield held a 12-hour strike after rejecting a £4.30 pay increase offer. The workers in the three strikes are in the GMB union.

Rail strikes announced at Virgin West Coast UK franchise

Rail staff working for Virgin West Coast are to hold a series of 24-hour strikes. Two will be held in December and four in January.

Nearly 2,000 members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT), including train managers and on-board caterers, voted 90 percent in favour of the action, which seeks parity with an offer made to Virgin West Coast train drivers.

Drivers were offered just an additional £500 a year pensionable basic pay in return for agreeing to give up a one-hour reduction in weekly worktime.

Bus workers in southeast England to strike over union recognition

Bus staff employed by Quality Line in Epsom in Surrey will hold a 24-hour strike beginning midnight Sunday. They are protesting the company’s refusal to recognize the RMT.

Teachers in Sheffield, UK to strike

Teachers at Crookes Primary School in Sheffield, England are set to strike on Wednesday and Thursday of next week, followed by Tuesday and Wednesday the following week.

The strike by the National Education Union members is in response to policy changes and workloads imposed by the school’s new head teacher.

Refuse workers dispute in Birmingham, UK ends

A dispute involving refuse workers in the English city of Birmingham was officially brought to a close following a vote by the workforce at the weekend.

The dispute, which lasted three months, was in response to Labour Party-run Birmingham City Council’s plans to cut around 100 jobs by getting rid of third tier grade workers responsible for safe operation at the rear of the refuse collecting vehicles.

Under the new agreement hammered out under the auspices of the government’s conciliation service Acas, the posts will be retained, but retitled and given additional duties.

As part of the settlement, the Unite union has agreed to drop high court action against the council. In September the then leader of the council, John Clancy, resigned after coming under criticism for his botched attempt to impose a resolution.

Strike ballot of UK academic staff begins

Balloting of academic staff at UK universities began on Wednesday and will take place over the next seven weeks.

The ballot is in response to Universities UK’s (UUK) plans to end their defined benefit pension plan, replacing it with an inferior defined contribution scheme. The UUK pension scheme finances pensions for over 400,000 academic and other university staff.

The ballot is being carried out by the Universities and College Union,

which is in addition considering trying to obtain a judicial review.

French power workers strike

French gas and electric supply workers held a 24-hour strike Wednesday beginning at 9pm. The strike, organised by the CGT union, is part of an ongoing dispute over pay.

French oil refinery workers strike

A 24-hour strike at ExxonMobil and Total SA oil refineries at Fos sur Mer and Grandpuits near Paris on November 23 caused disruption to production.

The strike was called by the CGT union and is over maintaining the current collective bargaining agreement.

Strike threat by French airline staff

Pilots working for the Air France low-cost subsidiary airline, Hop, have threatened a strike over the Christmas holiday period. The pilots are in dispute over working hours and in particular the so-called "short nights" system.

Under the system, pilots must not be expected to fly without a minimum 10-hour break between the last flight of one day and the first flight of the next. Management is seeking to reduce the maximum hours of the break. Yesterday marked the deadline for the completion of current negotiations with SNPL, the pilots' union.

March by Siemens workers in Berlin

Hundreds of Siemens workers marched through the German capital of Berlin on November 23 to protest plans by Siemens management to cut 6,900 jobs worldwide.

Half of the job losses would be in Germany itself. Siemens is a multinational engineering and technology company.

Greek civil servants strike

Civil servants working for the Greek Culture Ministry in Athens held a 24-hour strike on Wednesday against cuts to its online facilities.

In the afternoon civil servants from the Attica region also came out on strike and held a protest outside the Health Ministry. They were protesting the ending of hundreds of fixed term contracts and subsequent job losses. The civil servants are members of the ADEDY union.

General strike call by Greek unions

A general strike by private and public sector workers is to take place in Greece on December 14.

It is to protest pension and pay cuts and to call for higher wages and the recruitment of public sector staff. The call was initiated by the public sector union body ADEDY.

The strike is the latest by workers against the pseudo-left Syriza government that came to power in 2015 and continued the imposition of savage austerity carried out by its conservative and social democratic predecessors.

The strike coincides with Syriza's latest talks with the European Union over further austerity measures, including raising billions of euros in privatisations.

Strike and protest by taxi drivers in Spanish capital

Taxi drivers in Madrid held a 24-hour strike on Wednesday against the Uber and Cabify companies that use mobile phone apps to hail taxis.

Several thousand attended a rally held in the city centre. They argue that car-pool services Uber and Cabify are not covered by the same regulatory system and so are able to undercut mainstream taxi services.

Finnish unions end disputes

Workers in Finland's paper production industries have ended their overtime ban imposed after employers refused a pay rise. The employers have now signed a new two-year collective agreement with the Paper Workers' Union for a 3.5 percent rise.

A weeklong strike by around 1,000 electricians working in the technology sector ended after employers agreed to a two-year agreement offering a 3.2 percent pay rise.

The electricians are members of the Finnish Electrical Workers' Union. Middle East

Israeli airport staff to strike

Israeli Airport Authority (IAA) workers at Ben Gurion airport in Israel are set to hold a 24-hour strike beginning Friday evening. The strike is to protest plans by the Interior Ministry to levy a property tax on the IAA.

The strike is expected to affect around 180 flights and impact an estimated 28,000 passengers.

Africa

Mozambique fishermen strike over unpaid wages and missing contributions

Mozambique fishermen struck on November 21 demanding unpaid wages. While wages have not been paid for four months, their national insurance contributions have gone missing for the last two years.

The workers are employed by Ematum, the Mozambique Tuna Company. Company owner Antonio Rosario is a high-level officer in the state intelligence agency. He was awarded loans of \$850 million in 2013-14 from European banks for investment in the fishing company.

The loans, allAfrica reports, were guaranteed by the country's previous president.

Police violence used against Sudan brick workers and local population

On November 23, Sudan brick factory employees and local residents in El Jireif East, a locality in Khartoum, faced police violence to enforce a government order to demolish the brick factories.

Police, supported by security forces, arrived in 71 lorries and 53 other vehicles, used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse angry protesters.

Six people were rendered unconscious through tear gas inhalation and one protester lost his fingers from an exploding tear gas canister. Eleven others were injured from baton blows, including two nine-year-old children.

Some workers and the factory owner were arrested.

Many of the locals joined the workers to demand the preservation of the recognised historic brick factories, while opposing the sell-off of the land to investors.

South African miners' union presides over end of national bargaining

South Africa's National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) concluded a wage deal with the coal mine operators' consortium, the Chamber of Mines, on November 22.

The NUM accepted the scrapping of unified negotiations through the Chamber of Mines, negotiating instead on a company-by-company basis.

Mineworkers at smaller companies are getting a pay increase of 6 to 7.5 percent for the years 2017 and 2018, plus 1 percent in 2019.

In other cases, a different settlement has been agreed—a R1100 (US\$79.31) pay-off for 2017, and 7.5 to 8.5 percent for the following two years.

NUM members at Kangra coal mine, Mpumalanga, are planning to strike over housing allowances.

South Africa's Barberton gold miners strike over sacked union

officials

Gold miners at Barbeton mines came out on strike November 22 in defence of two sacked NUM officials. One is accused by management of going absent without permission and the other of assaulting another worker.

The strike was declared illegal and all the workers were dismissed.

After an intervention by a local town hall official, the miners were reinstated, but without the two officials, who the company refused to take back.

Ugandan doctors postpone strike while nurses prepare to strike

Doctors in Uganda have returned to work after a four-week strike. This followed an agreement with the government to pay new start doctors five million Ugandan shillings (US \$1,400) a month. Also agreed was the allocation of two billion shillings (US \$560,000) in next year's budget for wages.

Nurses are threatening to strike December 5 if their demands for a 400 percent pay increase and allowances totalling 9 million shillings each are not met.

Members of several other Ugandan unions are either on strike or preparing to strike.

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