

Workers Struggles: Europe

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature by e-mailing information to editor@wsws.org

Museum staff at the Louvre museum in Paris resumed their strike on May 25, after suspending it for two days to mark the French holiday weekend. Workers taking strike action at the Arc de Triomphe and the Pantheon monument struck over the weekend. The strike began on May 19 and involves other museums in the city.

The workers are taking action to demand the hiring of more staff, an end to temporary contracts and a cut in their workload to hire more people, especially for security, and to end a system of temporary contracts. Trade union representatives of the strikers are to meet Ministry of Culture officials this week to discuss the dispute.

London Underground workers voted to reject a management paper regarding their employment contract on May 19, opening the way for a ballot for industrial action.

The workers, members of the Rail Maritime and Transport Union, voted 2,184 to 70 against accepting London Underground's word that pay and conditions will be maintained when staff transfer to private firms. Some staff are to be transferred to other firms as part of plans to privatise a section of the Underground.

Workers in the northern Basque region of Spain participated in a one-day general strike on May 21. Unions demanding the introduction of a 35-hour working week called the strike.

The industrial action hit factories, schools, universities, and other services. In the city of Bilbao all urban bus services were shut down, while the local metro and train schedules were also hit. San Sebastian Donostia and other cities in the region faced similar shutdowns due to the strike.

The strike follows an agreement earlier this year by the regional government of Andalucia to cut the working week for civil servants to 35 hours.

Postal and telecom workers in Croatia are to take strike

action May 28 to protest against the privatisation of the Hrvatske Telekomunikacije state telecommunications company. The strike action will result in dead telephone lines and undelivered post throughout the country.

The government has proposed that a quarter of the company be sold to a "strategic investor" this year, and that between 30 and 35 percent be sold to foreign and domestic shareholders, while the government will hold on to the remainder. These proposals have yet to be passed in the parliament. The telecom union representing the workers is not opposing the sell-off of the company, calling instead for less of it to be sold off.

On May 21 the union issued a statement saying that it wanted 20 percent of the company sold to a foreign investor. It also proposed that 30 percent go to the state pensions fund and that the remainder be distributed to current and former workers and war veterans.

A demonstration of more than 700 workers took place at the headquarters of CKD Transport Systems in Prague, Czech Republic. The protest was not organized by the trade unions, but arose spontaneously. Workers have not been paid in three months and most have used up all of their savings. Social aid received by workers is barely enough to buy food, while rents, utility and other bills have gone unpaid. Some families have already been threatened with eviction by landlords.

The workers—who have worked for three months on tram, subway and other orders—have said that they refuse to bear the brunt on the firm's financial crisis, brought on by a corrupt management, which has awarded itself high salaries and bonuses. The firm's debt is already so high that banks have indicated they will not extend any further credit until changes in management take place, despite the fact that there is still a high demand for its products on the market.

Trade union leaders have asked for a meeting with social-democratic Prime Minister Zeman, warning of growing radicalisation among the workers. They are pressing for a state take-over of the firm, and restructuring and sale to new "responsible" owners. But due to the

deepening government budget crisis, the probability of any substantial state aid to CKD—or any of the dozens of newly-privatised state companies—is becoming more and more improbable.

The mayor of Rome, Francesco Rutelli, threatened to close the summer season at the Rome Opera House following a strike on May 18 by 500 musicians, chorus members, electricians and cleaners. The strike was over a contract dispute and forced the cancellation of the opening performance of Verdi's *Aida* —the main performance of the opera season.

Rutelli stated that if the seven scheduled performances of *Aida* do not take place he would cancel the whole summer opera season, and threatened to close the theatre down completely.

The Rome Opera House is subsidised by the government's arts department and from the Rome local authority, but has been suffering large losses. However under new laws all Italian opera houses must set up sponsorship schemes in order to raise finances to fund themselves

On May 24 Polish coal miners clashed with riot police outside the Finance Ministry in Warsaw. The miners, from mining towns in Silesia in the southwest of the country, were blockading the ministry to demand more funds for the mining industry and a better redundancy and retraining programme for miners leaving the coal industry.

The mining section of the Solidarity trade union called the demonstration, following the failure of negotiations last week with the government. The Solidarity-led government plans to slash more than 100,000 miners' jobs by the year 2002 by closing half of the industry's 50 mines. The plan proposes to cut coal output to 112 million metric tons a year from the current 137 million.

University lecturers at older universities throughout the UK took strike action for 24 hours on May 25 to demand an increase in pay. The Association of University Teachers (AUT) called the strike. Members of the AUT voted to reject a management offer of a 3.5 percent pay rise. The AUT is calling for a pay rise of 10 percent this year. Lecturers' pay has fallen by 35 percent in comparison to similar professions in the past 20 years.

AUT General Secretary David Triesman said of the dispute, "This major disruption to universities must persuade the employers to improve their 3.5 percent offer if we are to avoid a programme of action later in the summer." The AUT has threatened to call further strikes and other activities short of strikes if its demands are not

met. Further strike action threatens to affect this year's admissions process, as well as summer exams. The union said that it would call short-notice disruptions including stopping administrative work, unplugging phones and refusing to answer e-mails.

The Conservative Party's higher education spokesman, Damian Green, said, "For all the government's talk about extra money going to universities, those who work in them have seen little evidence of any improvement either in pay or in the services provided to students."

Lecturers in most of the new universities (former polytechnics) could also be involved in strike action shortly. The National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, which represents many lecturers in these universities, is also demanding a 10 percent pay increase for this year. The union recently issued a statement saying that if it was also offered a 3.5 percent pay deal, it expected its members to reject it.

The union's annual conference is being held this weekend and it is expected that a motion supporting industrial action will be passed.

On May 18 hundreds of contract engineers working for the Wood Group and Amec, two of the largest oil service companies in the North Sea, took indefinite strike action to demand a better pay deal. The workers are self-employed subcontractors and work for firms such as Shell. The workers took strike action to protest against management plans to cut their pay by 25 percent during this year.

Contractors working for Shell walked out of a meeting with management after being informed that management were demanding an immediate pay cut of 8 percent and a further 7 percent cut before the end of the year. This was to be on top of a 10 percent cut already imposed this year. Jake Molloy, the general secretary of the offshore worker's union, OILC, said, "They are very angry about the way they are being treated and have had enough."

A spokesman for Amec said about 50 of their workers were involved in the dispute.

The engineers, the majority of whom are not member of OILC, are to meet in Aberdeen next week to decide how to proceed. Strike action during the summer would disrupt major summer maintenance projects on the oilrigs.



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