

Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

12 October 2000

Greek workers take 24-hour general strike

Public and private sector workers in Greece began a 24-hour general strike on October 10. The General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) called the strike in protest at government proposals to deregulate the labour market. The strike was also a protest against the privatisation of state-run or controlled companies such as OTE Telecoms and the Public Power Corporation (DEH).

The Greek government is proposing new laws capping overtime, giving employers flexibility in setting working hours, as well as ending restrictions on mass layoffs.

The GSEE represents around 2 million workers and has been supported by the ADEDY trade union—an umbrella group that organises civil servants. The unions are calling for the introduction of a 35-hour week.

The strike halted virtually all public transport and banking. Many public services closed, including Post Offices and utility offices. Hospitals only handled emergency cases during the strike. The Olympic Airways airline was only able to make a few scheduled flights. Most inter-city train services were cancelled and Athens' new underground system was closed.

The government and representatives of the GSEE are to meet this week to discuss the dispute. A government spokesman said they would introduce their proposals even if talks with the unions failed.

Workers begin a week of strike action in Italy

On October 9, workers throughout Italy began a week of strikes and protests. More than half of the country's schools were closed, as 350,000 of Italy's 700,000 teachers took strike action in a dispute over pay. The strike was the first nation-wide action by teachers in 13 years. The Education Ministry has offered teachers an increase of 265,000 lire (\$120) each per month, which they rejected.

Up to 100,000 workers demonstrated in Rome. On

the same day TV and radio journalists began a two-day strike to protest delays in the negotiation of a new contract. Other workers including air traffic controllers and public transport staff also struck.

On October 11, air traffic controllers in Milan and Venice plan to strike. On the same day tram bus and subway staff have agreed to hold a four-hour strike. The transport workers then plan to strike for 24 hours from October 12.

Ireland: Aer Lingus cabin crew to hold one-day strike

Cabin crew employed by the Irish airline Aer Lingus are to strike for 24 hours on October 17 over pay, pensions and the use of casual employment. The strike has been called by the IMPACT trade union and will involve 1,400 cabin crew staff. It has been estimated that the protest will cost Aer Lingus over £2 million and disrupt up to 20,000 passengers.

Cabin crew are calling for large-scale improvements in pay. At present pay begins at £5 an hour and rise to about £10 an hour after 24 years service. All staff are forced to begin service with the company on temporary, part-time contracts. These contracts only guarantee 20 hours a week.

Irish ambulance drivers to strike this week

Ambulance drivers in the Dublin area are set to strike on October 12 in a dispute over manpower. The stoppage is due to last for 36 hours. The dispute centres on the filling of five vacancies in the ambulance control room in Tara Street, Dublin. Ambulance workers have called on Dublin Fire Brigade workers to support the strike.

South African platinum miners continue strike

About 10,000 miners are now in the fourth week of a strike at mines owned by Anglo American Platinum Corporation (Amplats). On Wednesday, October 11 they marched on the firm's headquarters in central Johannesburg insisting on their demands for a 10 percent wage increase and improved working

conditions.

Amplats has attempted to break the strike by paying a 9 percent pay increase to all its 43,000 employees, including the striking miners, backdated to July. It has refused further talks with the union, stating that the offer is final and non-negotiable. The company is continuing production because their refineries and smelter are using stockpiles and union attempts to bring out this section of the workforce—which would have broken a Labour Court ruling against secondary action—appear to have failed.

Unlike the gold mining sector, which has seen falling prices and the loss of thousands of jobs, platinum prices have been soaring. Amplats recently reported that their interim earnings had doubled to R2.611 billion.

Commentators say that Amplats is following the lead given by the ANC government last year in a wage dispute with 12 public sector unions. The government abandoned talks with the unions and unilaterally imposed a pay settlement. Shortly afterwards the unions backed down.



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