

# Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

12 May 2006

## Europe

### **Greek public sector workers stage 24-hour national strike**

On May 10, thousands of public sector workers in Greece participated in a 24-hour nationwide general strike. The industrial action was called by Greece's largest trade union federation, the General Confederation of Greek Labour, and the Union of Greek Civil Servants. The strike action is in response to anger among civil servants at government plans to allow public sector employees to be more easily sacked. Legislation to this end is due to be enacted by March 2008.

The strike had a widespread impact as subway, buses and trams cancelled all services. Inter-city train services ran on a very limited service. Courts, government offices, schools and public utilities were also closed while state hospitals operated on a skeleton staff. In addition, Olympic Airlines was forced to cancel more than 100 domestic and international flights as a result of the stoppage.

In a separate dispute, bank workers staged strike action on the same day in opposition to the abolition of collective wage bargaining in the industry.

### **Deutsche Telekom workers strike in pay dispute in Germany**

Staff at the German telecommunications company Deutsche Telekom staged a temporary strike on May 9 in a dispute over pay. Some 6,000 workers participated in the action, which was held at almost 50 Telekom locations all over Germany. Deutsche Telekom employs 110,000 workers.

The industrial action began following the breakdown in a third round of negotiations between the public sector union Verdi and Deutsche Telekom on May 5. Following the industrial action the two parties agreed to meet for two days in Berlin for the fourth round of negotiations.

### **Firefighters in southern England to strike**

Firefighters in Hertfordshire, just outside London, are expected to strike on May 15 over plans by the local authority to close two fire stations and cut up to 50 firefighter posts to save money.

Earlier this week, the Fire Brigades Union gave notice that its members in Hertfordshire would take industrial action in protest at the closures. They could also strike again on May 20.

### **Irish council workers threaten strike action**

Workers at Waterford City Council are set to strike over pay. The workers say that they are being paid less than colleagues in other local authorities and are to strike against the differentials on Monday, May 15.

A spokesman for the public sector union Siptu said that the pay gap was largest in the local authority's water section. "Pay for manual operatives in Waterford is €500 a week, compared with up to €750 elsewhere," he said.

Among the services affected will be water, sewage, housing, roads, traffic, litter, libraries, open spaces, parks and cemeteries.

### **Spanish hotel workers announce plans to strike**

Some 15,000 hotel workers on the Costa del Sol, Spain could take strike action during the busy summer months. The threatened strike by chambermaids, cleaners, receptionists and other staff could close hotels across the popular tourist resort for up to 14 days on June 22 to 25, July 20 to 23, and August 1 to 6.

The unions involved are demanding a £20-a-month pay rise and better conditions for their members. The action must be agreed by union delegates at a general meeting scheduled for May 24.

## Africa

### **Ghanaian building workers on strike at new US embassy**

Over 750 workers building the new US embassy in Accra, Ghana, have taken industrial action to press their demand for higher salaries.

The workers are employees of BL Harbert Ghana

Limited, an American-owned construction company, based in Accra. They held a demonstration on May 5 to demand an increase of at least 50 percent in their monthly salaries. Currently, each worker receives a basic salary of 450,000 cedis, or about US \$50. The strikers describe this as a pittance.

At the start of the month workers began a sit-in in protest at management's announcement of a redundancy package of 590,000 cedis (US\$67) for each employee. In response to the sit-in, on May 5 the site was locked and under guard by armed police.

### **Striking South African farm workers under arrest**

Around 30 workers at a chicken farm in Durbanville, Cape Town, South Africa, have been arrested and charged with public violence, assault and intimidation. Dominique Swartz, a spokeswoman for their union, the Food and Allied Workers Union (Fawu), said they had been arrested after setting fire to a tyre to keep warm. She said the police had assaulted two women during the incident.

A shop steward at the farm, Karel Hendricks, said that police had pressed a gun against his face. Swartz condemned "police brutality that is reminiscent of the apartheid days."

The strike, which was legal according to South Africa's strict labour laws, was held to demand a wage increase from their employer, the Tydstroom Chicken Farm in Klipheuwel.

### **Textile workers on strike in Zimbabwe**

Around 700 textile workers are on strike at David Whitehead Limited in Chegutu, Zimbabwe. The issues behind the strike include the company's failure to pay the salaries promised to the workers and misuse of the company's funds.

The company was in the news last year for failing to pay its workforce any salaries for five months. The workforce had been led to believe that when it became profitable again, they would benefit due to the sacrifices they had made earlier.

A member of staff who is on the workers' committee said, "We have been very patient with the company in the past two years when they owed us several months of wages and yet the management still continues to be extravagant with the resources that we have." He gave examples of this, including the managers moving into expensive new offices and buying new company cars for themselves.



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