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.

Thousands protest government austerity in Lisbon

Tens of thousands protested in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon last Saturday in opposition to the austerity measures being imposed by the Socialist Party government.

The demonstration followed the May 13 government announcement introducing further spending cuts and tax increases. The government is planning to cut its budget deficit to 7.3 percent of gross domestic product this year from last year's high of 9.4 percent. By 2013 it plans to cut the deficit to 2.8 percent.

Many of those protesting carried banners, including some showing solidarity with the present struggle of workers in Greece. One of them read, "Let's follow Greece: General Strike!"

Despite the scale of the attacks being carried out by the government the Portuguese trade union federation, the Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses (CGTP), has refused to call a single strike in protest. Speaking at the protest, CGTP head Manuel Carvalho da Silva said that any action the union would consider in future would be based on what "the constitution allows" with "their timing and form depending on the government's actions".

Tens of thousands protest government austerity in Romania

On Monday, tens of thousands of public sector workers struck and protested in Romania in opposition to the government's austerity programme. The action involved workers employed in health, education, public administration and other areas.

During the day, protesters gathered outside government headquarters in the capital, Bucharest. Amongst these were pensioners calling for a reversal of plans to slash pensions by 15 percent. Health workers also protested outside hospitals and medical facilities to demand the provision of more basic supplies and an increase in pay.

The Democratic Liberal Party government of Prime Minister Emil Boc plans to impose severe cuts in public spending, including wage and pension cuts, as agreed under a €20 billion IMF-led aid deal. The government plans to reduce the budget deficit to some 6.8 percent of gross domestic product as a result of the cuts.

The austerity measures will cut public sector employees' pay by 25 percent and pensions by 15 percent. The public sector employs 1.3 million workers and accounts for a third of all jobs.

State railway staff in Spain strike for 24 hours

On Saturday railway employees in Spain staged a 24-hour strike to oppose changes in their working conditions by the state rail company RENFE. The stoppage was called by the CGT and CCOO trade unions. The strike was not supported by other unions, including the UGT, which boycotted the action.

According to media reports about 90 percent of the workers employed by RENFE participated in the action, which affected some 500,000 passengers nationwide. Among the cities most affected were Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Valencia and Bilbao.

Public transport staff, journalists and lawyers strike in Greece

Public transport staff in Athens, Greece began a 24-hour strike on Thursday in opposition to the social democratic Pasok government's deepening austerity programme. The transport strike is set to bring the metro, tram, buses and trolley bus system to a halt. Staff employed on the Kifissia-Piraeus urban electric railway also participated.

Journalists will also strike nationally on the same day, affecting all media, including TV news reports. During the day journalists are set to attend a rally in the city centre. The strike will also result in no newspapers appearing on Friday. The journalists are also demanding a halt to job losses in the industry and that unemployed journalists be provided with assistance.

The strikes coincide with an ongoing strike by lawyers that entered its third day on Thursday. The lawyers are to be joined by notaries on Thursday and Friday. The notaries are opposed to the

plans to merge their pension fund with other funds.

Museum and library staff workers continue strike in Glasgow

On May 29 museum and library staff in Glasgow, Scotland took their fourth day of industrial action in a month. The employees are in dispute with Culture and Sport Glasgow to oppose cuts in pay and conditions. Among the attacks the workers are protesting are a 10 percent wage cut for 150 workers, a pay freeze and cuts in public holidays and overtime rates.

Several trade unions, including Unison, Unite, GMB and Bectu, are involved in the dispute.

The strike led to the closure of Glasgow's main museums and galleries, including the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, the Gallery of Modern Art and the Burrell Collection. A number of libraries and sports facilities were also affected.

Culture and Sport Glasgow are imposing the cuts as part of a restructuring plan to make savings of £3.4 million in the current financial year.

Egyptian textile workers protest revoking of pay agreement

On May 30, around 250 workers employed at Amonsito Company textile plant in Cairo demonstrated in front of the Supreme Court. They were demanding the enforcement of an agreement they had reached with Minister of Manpower Aisha Abdel Hady and Banque Misr, Amonsito's creditor.

In 2007 Amonsito's owner, Syrian-American businessman Adel Agha fled Egypt, leaving the textile factory heavily debt-ridden. The workers have not received their full wages ever since.

In March, following a 21-day sit-in by the workers outside parliament, an agreement was reached between the Manpower Ministry and Banque Misr, which as creditor is responsible for liquidating the company's assets, whereby workers would be paid LE 106 million. When this agreement was not upheld, workers resumed their sit-in.

According to *Al Masry Al Youm*, the workers are also investigating whether or not security forces violated their rights during attempts to end a 16-day-long sit-in before the Shura Council, Egypt's upper house of parliament.

Transnet workers return to work in South Africa

Workers belonging to the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), who had been on strike at the rail freight and logistics company Transnet, returned to work at the end of last week. Workers belonging to the other union at Transnet, the United Transport and Allied Trade Union (ATATU), had returned a few days earlier. The strike had lasted 18 days overall.

More than 50,000 workers had struck for a wage increase, having rejected the company's initial 8 percent offer. The workers finally settled for an 11 percent increase in pay plus a one-off payment that will make the effective increase for this year 12 percent.

According to a Reuters report, Transnet estimates it will take three months to fully recover from the effects of the strike that has led to bottlenecks in the freight movements of iron ore and coal.

South African Metrorail rail workers end strike

SATAWU members working for Metrorail, which covers commuter railway journeys, have returned to work. They have accepted a 10 percent pay offer from the umbrella organisation, the Passenger Rail Agency of SA that runs Metrorail. ATATU members had returned to work previously, having accepted the 10 percent offer. The company's original offer was 5 percent, but the workers were demanding 13 percent.

However, workers earning less than R70,000 (US$9,100) will get an 12.5 percent increase and all workers will receive a one-off payment of R1,000 (US$130) in June. The strike had hit 2 million commuters who use the service to get to work each day. The SATAWU members were on strike for just over two weeks.

Netcare workers in South Africa launch strike

Around 4,000 nurses and administrative workers represented by the Health and other Service Personnel Trade Union of South Africa (HOSPERSA) and employed at some of Netcare's facilities began strike action Wednesday. The action had been postponed from last week. The company said the strike would affect around 17 percent of their business.

The workers rejected an 8.25 pay increase from the company and are seeking 12 percent.

Netcare is South Africa's largest private health care provider and has a unit in Britain.