

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

6 May 2011

Greek power workers to strike over privatisation

Workers at the country's biggest electricity producer PPC will stage rolling 48-hour strikes next month, in protest at government plans to reduce the state's holding in the firm.

Workers at the power utility have been involved in several strikes over the past few years against the threat to privatise the industry. The Greek government, which owns 51 percent of PPC, wants to sell as much as 17 percent of its holdings in the company next year as part of a €50 billion privatisation drive to pay its debts.

Greek refinery workers to resume pay strike

Workers at the country's largest refiner, Hellenic Petroleum, said they will resume strike action suspended last month after they failed to reach an agreement with management on a wage rise in line with Eurozone inflation.

A 10-day strike is planned to begin today, May 6, and will affect all of the company's three refineries, which represent a combined capacity two-thirds of total refining production in Greece.

A company spokesman told Reuters that Hellenic will ask a court to declare the walkout illegal under Greek law.

German train drivers in further action over pay

Train drivers employed by private regional companies are to take fresh industrial action this week in a dispute over pay.

The drivers have been involved in several strikes already this year over pay, including the demand for a wage deal for drivers at private operators, equivalent to the deal won recently by Deutsche Bahn drivers. Last month a 60-hour strike was called by the GDL union. The latest strike is expected to be less widespread. GDL said it had arranged pay talks with all of the subsidiary companies of Hessische Landesbahn along with some firms under Netinera and BeNEX. Veolia, AKN Eisenbahn, Prignitzer Eisenbahn, Hohenzollerische Landesbahn, Bayerische Regiobahn, Berchtesgadener Land Bahn and Ostseeland Verkehr are all subject to the strikes. National operator Deutsche Bahn is not affected.

London subway strikes over sackings

A series of Tube strikes has been announced, due to start in less than two weeks, over the sacking of two workers.

The first walkout is expected May 16, with another five before the end of June.

London Underground (LU) has said the drivers were sacked over charges of "abusive behaviour" and "disregarding safety systems".

The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union said it expected about 1,500 drivers, who are members of the union, not to turn up for shifts on six periods in May and June.

The RMT said almost two-thirds of its members voted in favour of industrial action, because Eamon Lynch and Arwyn Thomas were sacked because of their trade union activities. Both men have taken a case of unfair dismissal to an employment tribunal.

Drivers on the Northern and Bakerloo Line held two strikes last year over the dismissals.

UK teachers to vote on strikes over pensions

Two teaching unions have voted to ballot for industrial action over the governments' plans to increase pension contributions, lessen the value of pensions, and to increase the pension age to 68.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) are to ballot together. The two unions, making up the majority of unionised teachers in England and Wales, plan to go on strike at the end of June.

Teachers at the recent NUT conference discussed motions to oppose the increasing privatisation of schools and the excessive workload they face.

Strike ballot at South Tyneside College, England

Members of University and Colleges Union (UCU) at South Tyneside College were balloted for industrial action May 3 in a dispute over jobs and pay. The ballot result is expected May 16.

College management have refused to reconsider plans that will put 200 jobs at risk and see some lecturers lose as much as £11,000 from their annual salary.

According to a poll in the local *Shields Gazette*, 84 percent of respondents supported the college staff in their dispute. The ballot comes just months after 38 staff accepted voluntary redundancy. In addition, 38 posts were lost last summer.

Elsewhere in the same region, Newcastle College and Bishop Auckland College have announced plans for over 350 redundancies between them.

Cuts protest at UK Equality and Human Rights Commission

Staff at the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) staged a one-hour strike May 3 in several cities in protest over cuts.

The first one-hour stoppage was at the main offices in Cardiff, Birmingham, Glasgow, London and Manchester.

The commission plans to more than halve its staff from 460 to 200 within 12 months, with many of those remaining being consultants or on short term contracts after budget cuts of 68 percent.

The government has announced it is withdrawing funding for the EHRC's helpline and grants programme, and the commission has moved forward its plans to close its regional offices.

The commission's budget is to be cut down to £22.5 million by 2015—from £70 million when it was formed in 2007.

BBC journalists balloted for strike over compulsory redundancies

Thousands of BBC journalists are being balloted for industrial action, in response to the threat of compulsory redundancies across the Corporation.

Around 100 BBC journalists based in the World Service, BBC Monitoring, Online, and in Scotland and Wales are threatened with compulsory redundancy.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) is to ballot members after the corporation refused to consider further moves to secure redeployment or find alternative posts for around 100 staff.

Finnish paper workers continue strikes to force stalled wage talks

Around 1,200 paper mill workers began fresh industrial action this week at UPM-Kymmene aimed at speeding stalled wage talks.

Around 1,500 paper mill workers are continuing a two-week strike at Stora Enso and Metsaliitto plants.

Thousands of Egyptian workers continue protests for better pay and against corruption

Thousands of workers continued protests May 3 in Cairo and a number of other governorates.

In Helwan, almost 3,000 workers at the Mefco Helwan Furniture Company continued striking for the second consecutive day, demanding better wages (including the 15 percent raise approved for government employees) and denouncing the company board's failure to respond to their demands.

Employees at the country's transportation authority announced they

would be halting their strike, which began on May 2, following pleas from passengers. The workers vowed to resume the strike if their demands are not met by the end of the second term at schools and universities.

Doctors have threatened to organize a week-long general strike beginning May 10 in hospitals nationwide, in support of their demand to force the dismissal of the health minister—a remnant of the Mubarak regime accused of attempting to privatise public health insurance.

The general assembly in charge of the strike said it would exempt doctors at emergency and intensive care units, as well as units treating acute conditions.

Workers at Anshas' first and second nuclear reactors organised a strike for the second consecutive day to demand increased pay and improved working conditions.

Egyptian Airports Company workers at the Abu Simbel International Airport continued striking this week inside airport terminals to demand incentive pay of up to 100 percent of their base salary, rather than the 50 percent they have been paid for the past five years under instruction by the company's CEO.

Workers at the Jawhara Ceramics factory, owned by detained businessman and former National Democratic Party leader Ahmed Ezz, went on strike May 3 in the industrial city of Sadat in Menoufiya governorate to demand better pay and the defence of their rights.

The strikers said the minimum wage should be set at LE1200, that a union to represent their force of 2,500 workers be set up, that they receive an hour's rest for lunch and medical care for dependants.

Botswana public sector strikers extend strike

The near 100,000 public sector workers who began a 10-day general strike on April 18, voted to extend their strike by another five days. Andrew Motsamai, general secretary of the Botswana Federation of Public Service Unions, announced the decision after talks with the government failed. The federation, an umbrella organisation of five different public sector unions, also announced a go slow after the return to work.

The strike won widespread support and is the biggest in the country's history. The workers are demanding a 16 percent pay increase, while the government is offering 5 percent.

Many workers view the strike as a challenge to the more than 40-year rule of the Botswana Democratic Party. During the strike thousands assembled each day in the grounds of the Gaborone Secondary School, shouting anti-government slogans.

Around 3,000 workers demonstrated in the Burkina Faso capital, Ouagadougou, last weekend against the spiralling increase in living costs and calling on President Compaore to resign. The Burkina Faso Workers Union has called for a 30 percent pay increase and for the cost of basic necessities to be reduced.

The recent rapid increase in inflation has been fuelled by the prolonged crisis in neighbouring Ivory Coast. This has added to the political crisis in the country brought about following the death of a student in police custody that led to widespread demonstrations. A mutiny of the presidential guard led Compaore to dismiss his government.

Doctors working in federal facilities in the south-eastern state of Enugu began a sympathy strike on Monday. They plan to remain on strike all this week and to repeat the week's strike action each month.

The strike by doctors organised in the Nigerian Medical Association is in sympathy with doctors working in the Enugu State University Teaching Hospital and in other state health institutions. They have been on strike since December last year, demanding the Enugu state government

implements the federally agreed Consolidated Medical Salary Scheme (CONMESS).

Bus drivers operating long distance services from the Ubungo bus terminal in Dar es Salaam went on strike for six hours last Sunday. The strike was in protest at the poor conditions and pay, and the drivers were demanding improved contracts from the Dar es Salaam Bus Owners Association (DABOA).

Their action found an echo, when up-country truck drivers also went on strike demanding improved contracts.



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