

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

27 May 2011

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Workers at Paris FedEx air hub strike

Workers at FedEx's Paris hub at Roissy-Charles-de-Gaulle airport in France walked out over three days last week in protest at a pay rise offer of only one percent. FedEx is a highly profitable global delivery company.

Flights to Memphis, Dubai and European cities were cancelled and freight shipping and parcel deliveries delayed after the 700 staff took industrial action. Unions are pressing for a five percent rise at the hub, FedEx's second biggest sorting centre after Memphis.

Greek public sector workers strike against increased working hours, privatisations

Public sector employees in Greece stopped work for four hours May 18 against increased working hours. Some civil servants are to see their weekly work hours increased by 2.5 hours to reach 40 hours under government plans. The public sector workers were also opposing other reforms, including a uniform wage structure and a law providing for public sector redundancies.

Hundreds of child day-care workers also took part in a march on May 18 against the planned adoption of a 40-hour work week from the current 30 hours.

The measures are all part of the government's austerity program, dictated by the European Union, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank in return for a €110-billion loan.

The same day, staff at the Piraeus port authority (OLP) staged a harbour protest, employees at Hellenic Postbank occupied their company offices for a second day, and workers at the Public Power Corporation (PPC-DEI) held a demonstration in Athens.

The actions were directed against the government's announcement that it will sell off state assets including OTE, the Balkans' largest telecoms operator, and the ports of Piraeus and Thessaloniki, which rank among the busiest in the Mediterranean in terms of tourism and trade.

The privatisations have been demanded by the EU, supposedly to raise €50 billion to pay off international creditors.

Employees of Opap SA, a listed Greek gambling operator, held a 24-hour strike May 25 to oppose government plans to sell part or all of its 34 percent stake in the company.

Greek oil refinery workers end four-day strike

Some 2,400 oil refinery workers ended a four-day strike at three oil refineries May 23 in opposition to wage cuts.

The industrial action at the Aspropyrgos, Thessaloniki, and Elefsina refineries was the second major strike in six weeks against Greek industrial giant Hellenic Petroleum by the oil workers.

Following a 17-day legal strike in April, industrial action was originally planned for May 6, but Hellenic Petroleum gained a court order blocking the strike.

Hellenic Petroleum is reportedly aiming to cut wages by up to 25 percent and to lengthen working hours.

UK public sector workers ballot on cuts to pensions, jobs and pay

Up to 500,000 civil and public servants begin voting this week in a national strike ballot over cuts to pensions, jobs and pay.

Hundreds of thousands of public sector jobs are threatened, pay is being frozen or set below inflation, and the coalition government intends to "reform" retirement provision so that civil and public servants will pay more and work longer for a lower pension.

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), with around 250,000 civil servants within it, voted May 18 to ballot for strike action. Two teaching unions also launched ballots this week and a third, the University and College Union (UCU), already has a mandate for rolling strike action.

Members of the University and College Union at Sheffield College in South Yorkshire, England, struck last week in opposition to plans to issue compulsory redundancy notices to 120 full-time staff, including 60 lecturers.

Lecturers picketed City College on May 16 and 18, Hillsborough College on May 17 and 19 and Norton College on May 18 and 20.

On Wednesday, further strikes set to take place on Thursday, May 26, and Friday, May 27, were called off by the UCU on the basis of the union holding further talks with management at Sheffield College.

This is the latest instance in which the UCU has demobilised strike action by its members at Sheffield College. Following a strike on April 27, the UCU suspended a strike, "following a commitment from management to negotiate meaningfully".

North London journalists ballot over staffing

Journalists at Tindle newspapers, North London, are to hold a fresh

ballot on industrial action in a dispute over inadequate staffing levels.

Reporters at Tindle's Enfield-based North London and Herts Newspapers group staged a series of strikes earlier this month to oppose management's policy of refusing to replace staff that had left the papers.

Maltese teachers in strike over employment conditions

The Malta Union of Teachers called a two-hour strike of lecturing and support staff at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology on May 20 in a dispute over employment conditions and a number of other issues.

It is the second such strike to be announced this month.

Serbian weapons factory workers in work-to-rule protest over nonpayment of wages

Workers at the Zastava Arms factory in Kragujevac, the fourth largest city in Serbia, have imposed a work-to-rule protest to demand that management secures new contracts and also pays their overdue April wages. Only essential maintenance is currently being carried out.

The central Serbian factory employs 2,150 workers who earn a monthly average of RSD 31,000 (€320). A small amount of the overdue pay was distributed to each worker last week.

Dispute declared at Jerusalem light rail over work conditions

A dispute has been declared at the Jerusalem light rail even before it has begun commercial operations.

The Histadrut trade union federation claims that Veolia Transportation SA, one of the owners of the railway's franchisee CityPass, has worsened working conditions and even fired some train drivers after they joined the Histadrut and set up a workers committee.

Industrial protests continue in Egypt over pay and work conditions

Six labour disputes, demanding better wages and working conditions, took place in Cairo and other governorates on May 18.

In Giza, scores of workers of the Frankie Sami Stainless Steel Company staged protests to demand better wages and bonuses. The employees claim the company has made huge profits exporting to 18 countries.

In Cairo, dozens of workers at the Ministry of Antiquities demonstrated in support of permanent positions. Workers threatened to close down the museums or leave them unguarded.

In Qafr al-Sheikh, 50 temporary workers of the Beyala Hospital went on strike after going unpaid for three months.

Protests to demand better wages and working conditions were also staged by the workers at the Spinning Company in Monufiya Governorate, public bakeries in Alexandria and the Beheira Company in Beheira Governorate.

Botswana public sector strike enters sixth week

Public sector workers in Botswana went out on strike on April 18 demanding a 16 percent pay increase. The 90,000 strikers, who include health and education workers, have had no pay increase for three years, and with high inflation their living standards are being eroded. The strike has remained solid with most secondary schools across the country closed. The union umbrella body representing the workers has been holding rounds of negotiations with the government and has now dropped their pay demand from 16 to 12 percent. The government is increasingly toughening its stance. Whilst initially offering the workers a 5 percent pay increase it has dropped this to just 3 percent. The government told around 1,500 of the workers it considers essential, including fire and sewage workers, that they were sacked for taking part in the strike. The government also said it would impose a "no work, no pay" policy.

Mauritania: Secondary school teachers three-day general strike

Mauritanian secondary school teachers organised in the National Union of Secondary Education and the Independent Union of Teachers of Secondary Education (SIPES) held a three-day general strike from May 22 to May 24. This is the second such strike within the space of two weeks.

Amongst their demands are a pay increase, incentive bonus and a housing allowance. SIPES called on the government to "meet the demands of teachers, in particular for the creation of a set of regulations governing their profession, the establishment by decree of criteria for assignment and promotion, payment of the equipment allowance promised by the president and payment of (a) chalk allowance".

Nigerian health workers disputes

Doctors in the south-western Nigerian state of Ekiti began indefinite strike action last Friday. The doctors are represented by the National Association of Government General Medical and Dental Practitioners.

Their main demand is for the state government to implement the federally agreed Consolidated Medical Salary Scale (CONMESS). They are also demanding the reversal of heavy tax demands imposed since January. Currently only doctors working at the State University Teaching Hospital at Ado-Ekiti are covered by the CONMESS agreement.

Meanwhile, nurses in Oyo state began industrial action this week. They are refusing to do night duties and cover emergencies. They took the action in response to hospital authorities unilaterally removing teaching allowances from nurses' pay. The nurses only became aware of the cut when they went to the bank.



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