

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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

Greek public sector strike to oppose privatisations

Workers in several state-owned concerns scheduled for privatisation are to hold a 24-hour strike next month to oppose their partial or full sale to private corporations.

According to union officials, a strike is scheduled for June 15 at telecoms firm OTE, energy utility PPC, the Post Savings Bank, as well as ports and water utilities.

Employees at OTE telecoms blocked Kifissias Avenue, one of Athens' busiest roads, earlier this week and picketed in front of the company headquarters in Maroussi to protest the government's move to reduce its stake in the telecommunications firm.

The protest was prompted by news that the Greek government had contacted Deutsche Telekom, which owns 30 percent of OTE, to arrange the sale.

A Telekom spokeswoman priced the purchase of the 10-percent stake at nearly €400 million and said the company had an option to buy the rest of the state's holding.

OTE is the largest telecom operator in the Balkans, employing around 30,000 workers across Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia.

Parking and traffic wardens strike in southern England

Up to 40 parking wardens, traffic wardens, maintenance engineers and cash collectors in Southampton, England, started a seven-day strike May 31 in protest at council pay cuts and a three-year pay freeze.

Refuse workers took action last week.

Conservative-led Southampton City Council said the only alternative to cuts would be more job losses and said it still expected drivers to continue paying for parking.

The public sector union Unison said workers faced a 4.5

percent wage cut, plus a three-year pay freeze and a loss of annual pay progression for two years. The union also estimated the council could lose up to £100,000 in revenue throughout the strike.

Traffic warden Andy Tubb told the BBC, "In real terms for myself it means about £1,300 loss over this next 12 months which then looks as though it's going to get worse as it goes through. My daughter wants to go to university. I would like to send her there; at the moment I don't think I'm going to have the money to do that".

London journalists vote to strike in defence of jobs

Journalists employed at newspaper group Newsquest in South London have voted overwhelmingly to go on strike in defence of jobs and journalistic standards.

The journalists had previously adopted a unanimous vote of no confidence in their top management, after a company decision to make an unspecified number of editorial staff redundant, while the newspaper group's titles continue to make substantial profits.

Newsquest London has announced job cuts at the *Croydon Guardian*, *Elmbridge Guardian*, *Epsom Guardian*, *Kingston Guardian*, *Streatham Guardian*, *Surrey Comet*, *Sutton Guardian*, *Wandsworth Guardian* and *Wimbledon Guardian*.

The group has also threatened an entire sports and leisure department of eight journalists with redundancy.

Irish catering workers protest outside award ceremony

On May 25, catering workers protested at the Annual Irish Restaurant Awards, hosted by the Restaurants Association of Ireland (RAI), calling on the RAI to stop its attack on workers' minimum wages and conditions.

The workers, members of the Restaurant and Catering Workers Forum, stood outside the building waving placards and handing out flyers.

The website of the Services Industrial Professional and

Technical Union (SIPTU) described the contrast between the protest and the “tuxedoed guests as they made their way into enjoy a champagne reception and five-course meal at the awards ceremony”.

One chef, Mijanur Rahman, was quoted as saying, “Restaurant owners have money for champagne and lavish events, but they don’t have money to pay us? I don’t know any restaurant workers who attend extravagant events like this”.

Portuguese rail strike over work conditions and revoked deal

Rail workers struck May 30 in protest at work conditions and the failure to implement an earlier deal on overtime and reducing traffic on certain lines.

The strike by controllers and ticket agents, which led to the cancellation of almost 90 percent of national trains, caused serious disruption.

Mozambique cashew workers strike

Around 600 workers, mainly women, went on strike this week at the Olam cashew nut processing plant in Nampula city in the north of the country.

They were protesting a cut in their wages. In their contract wages had been set at 1,680 meticais (\$56), which is below the national statutory minimum wage. However, the company then brought in a piece rate, whereby wages were determined by the number of nuts shelled. This led to workers’ already meagre wages being cut.

Strikers vowed not to return to work until their wages were restored. They are also demanding better meal provision and for toilets to be provided. Currently they have to use the nearby railway tracks to relieve themselves.

Morocco doctors protest

Last week more than 5,000 doctors protested outside the health ministry headquarters in Rabat. A planned march to the parliament building was prevented by brutal police action, leading to some of the protesters receiving fractures.

The protest was called by the Independent Public Sector Doctors’ union (SIMSP). Their demands included higher on-

duty payment, higher on-call payments and for doctors to be covered by medical insurance for work related injuries and infections.

Nigeria dock workers protest

Last week around 500 dock workers held a protest and rally outside the Nigerdock Nigeria Ltd premises at Tin Can Island, Lagos. The mainly contract workers were opposing alleged racist attitudes by the all-white management team.

They were also protesting the refusal of the company to appoint managers from amongst the black workforce, who possess the same skills and expertise as the white management, as well as poor pay and conditions. The workers are employed as subcontractors to Nigerdock, and the work is not secure.

One explained, “They do not allow us to have a union here. I have personally been renewing my contract for five years without a single promotion”.

Unions set to betray Botswana public sector strike

The public union umbrella body representing the 90,000 striking public sector workers looks set to accept the government’s derisory offer of a 3 percent pay increase. This is lower than the initial government offer of 5 percent. Workers had initially demanded a 16 percent increase.

Public sector workers have not had a pay increase for three years and inflation in double figures is rapidly eroding living standards.

The government has agreed to divvy up the extra pay to award the low-paid a bigger percentage increase.

The union said agreement would be dependent on the government reinstating the 1,400 essential workers sacked in the course of the dispute. Talks between the unions and government on Tuesday failed to reach a settlement.



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