

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

2 May 2014

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

Greek workers strike on May 1 against austerity measures

On Thursday Greek workers struck for 24 hours and protested nationwide against government austerity measures. Among those striking were transport workers, resulting in the suspension of ferry and train services. Ferries were cancelled at the main ports of Piraeus and Rafina. The ferry workers are protesting changes to collective contract agreements.

The strike and protests were called by the GSEE and Adedy trade union federations.

Thousands of public and private sector workers gathered in cities across Greece. According to reports some 1,000 police officers were deployed in Athens in response to the protests.

The strike is the latest token action by the trade union bureaucracy who have called 36 such stoppages so far, which are designed to dissipate workers anger and allow the imposition of deepening austerity measures.

The strike went ahead as the union bureaucracy entered talks with the New Democracy/PASOK government on further curtailing workers right to strike, while consolidating the position of the widely discredited trade unions.

A report in the Greek newspaper *To Ethnos*, April 29 stated, "The changes will also seek to address the disintegration of Greece's trade unions, by modernizing a legal framework for them that was put through in 1982. Over the years, the prestige of the unions has been lost, while ever fewer workers are actively participating in unions and industrial action".

French airline pilots' strike may be called off

The largest French pilots union, SNPL France Alpa, is preparing to call off a planned one-month strike by pilots. The strike, which was set to mainly hit Air France, is due to begin on May 3. News sources reported Wednesday that Transport Minister Frédéric Cuvillier said that there had been "significant advances" in talks with the SNPL.

Under the scheduled action pilots were set to walk off the job between 5.45am to 7.45am and from 12.45pm to 3.45pm each day.

Pilots are calling for the termination of a law passed under previous president Nicolas Sarkozy forcing transport workers to individually register their intention of joining a strike 48 hours before it starts. Pilots claim this allows airlines to make plans to employ strike-breakers in their

place in the event of a strike. They are also demanding a collective contract and improvements in working conditions. Cuvillier was not prepared to end the anti-strike law, instead stating that he will only request of companies "commitments of good conduct so that the law is not abused".

The RFI web site reported that SNPL France Alpa said it would decide today whether to proceed with the strike. According to SNPL France Alpa president Yves Deshayes, the union was awaiting written confirmation of a deal that "in principle may be likely to satisfy us".

Air France sought to demonise the workers accusing them of hitting its plans for future growth. This is despite the company imposing a drastic restructuring programme over the last few years, including the loss of more than 5,000 jobs. Company CEO Frédéric Gagey said, "After six years of operational losses, the objective of generating a positive operating income for 2014 is finally in sight. It seems inconceivable that a strike, the grounds of which no longer concern Air France and its pilots, can curb this momentum."

Greek fruit and vegetable producers and sellers begin dispute

On Monday fruit and vegetable producers and sellers at open-air markets in Greece held rallies to begin an indefinite strike against draft laws from the Development and Competitiveness ministry. Open-air markets will be suspended as a result, according to ANSAMED. Protesters held a rally and march from Athens Klathmonos Square and then proceeded to Parliament.

ANSAMED reported a similar rally was to be held in Kamara, Thessaloniki in northern Greece with a march on the Macedonia-Thrace ministry planned. The producers are concerned that the new measures will threaten, "50,000 families and serve large interests." They are opposed to government proposals to allocate stalls by annual lottery and for municipalities to decide on the ceiling in the number of sellers at markets. The agency reported that other grievance are "the separation between producers and other sellers at the market, and the fines (ranging from 1,000 to 5,000 euros) and sanctions for transgressions, which they said in their majority also carry jail terms of three months to a year".

Irish retail staff at Penneys seek pay rise

Four thousand Irish retail staff employed by Penneys, the cut-price clothing firm which is part of the Primark group, are seeking a pay rise. The current wage agreement is due to expire in June. Officials from the Mandate trade union are reported to have begun talks with Penneys

management.

UK firefighters set to strike

UK firefighters, members of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), are due to hold strikes over a three-day period in a long-running dispute, over the government's proposals to change pension rights including a later retirement age.

Firefighters will walk out for five hours on May 2 beginning at 12 noon, between 14.00 and 02.00 hours on May 3 and between 10.00 hours and 15.00 hours on May 4. They will also impose an overtime ban from May 2 to May 9.

Belfast city council staff strike threat over outsourcing plans

Workers employed by Belfast city council are threatening strike action over the council's plans to outsource leisure facilities currently run by the council. The staff are members of the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) who say 300 jobs would be at risk if the outsourcing proposals go ahead.

A council committee meeting last Friday endorsed the decision to outsource the facilities. The proposal was to be put to the full council meeting, scheduled for May 1. NIPSA planned to lobby and protest the meeting at Belfast City Hall.

Northern Ireland health staff threaten strike action over new payroll system

Unions representing health staff across Northern Ireland have threatened strike action, after glitches occurred in a new payroll system, which has left thousands of staff underpaid.

The Northern Ireland health minister Edwin Poots has come under sustained criticism for failing to get to grips with the problems, which have been going on several months.

Egyptian production workers strike

Workers employed by the Egyptian Propylene and Polypropylene Company in Port Said went on strike Monday. This follows the arrest of three of their colleagues when they went to the Al-Zohour police station to notify the police of their intention to strike, in line with labour law provisions.

According to Zeyad Bakry a lawyer at the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) who is representing the three, they were arrested at the instigation of the company. They were held in detention. According to Bakry, this detention was at the behest of the attorney general rather than the local prosecutor.

As well as protesting the three arrests, the strikers are demanding a share of profits for 2012 and 2013 under an incentive agreement and for the resignation of the company board.

Israeli postal staff escalate industrial action

Staff employed by the Israeli Postal Company upped their action on Tuesday by coming out on full strike. They had previously been refusing to deliver mail in the capital Tel Aviv. The action follows the company's plans to make 2,000 of the 9,000 staff redundant.

Israeli lab technicians end dispute

A six week dispute by lab technicians employed in education has ended following an agreement between the Histadrut Labour federation and the Education Ministry. The dispute was over working conditions and an improved pay demand.

Israeli hospital workers announce dispute

Last Thursday the Histadrut labour union declared a work dispute in all Israeli hospitals. The dispute centres on government cuts to health budgets and the poor wages of doctors and nurses. Under Israeli law the union can begin strike and other action two weeks after declaring a dispute.

Lebanese workers hold mass march

Tens of thousands of public service workers and teachers marched through the Lebanese capital Beirut on Tuesday to demand pay increases. The march was organised by a conglomerate of public sector associations, representatives of school teachers and the Union Coordination Committee. The marchers demanded that banks and big business should contribute to the public sector wage bill.

The marchers chanted: "Look at my salary, it doesn't last me half a month. How much do you make?" when passing banks and businesses.

South African platinum miners' strike continues

Negotiations between the Association of Miners and Construction Union AMCU, and the three South African platinum producers, Amplats, Impala and Lonmin, have again broken down.

AMCU rejected the platinum producers' offer of R12,500 (\$1,187) monthly basic starting pay over a five-year period.

In an attempt to break the strike the companies have directly contacted workers through cell phones, SMS and other means.

AMCU leader Joseph Mathunjwa said the offer had been rejected at mass meetings including one last Tuesday, which was attended by 5,000 members. He added that the strike could continue through till July.

The union proposed Amplats use its R600 million management overtime budget to meet its member's demand for a R12,500 basic wage for entry-

level underground workers over four years.

South African textile workers declare dispute

Wage negotiations are set to conclude on May 21/22 between representatives of the South African textile industry and the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU).

The union said management has not tabled an offer to its 50,000 members for it to negotiate around but instead wants to impose a wage freeze.

The union claims to support a double-digit pay increase over a two year agreement and improvements in retirement funding, union rights and company contributions towards the unions HIV/AIDS awareness and treatment programme.

The union has taken its dispute to the clothing industry bargaining council. SACTWU deputy general secretary Chris Gina said that the union was seeking a negotiated settlement and not a strike. "We can't say we will go on strike or anything like that. We want to reach an agreement with them. They must just be reasonable because we don't want any further disputes in the future", he said.

South African port workers in Eastern Cape locked out

Eastern Cape workers at the Port of Ngqura South Africa have been locked out by the state-owned Transnet in response to their ongoing strike. Workers are in dispute over manning levels, transport subsidies and the use of labour brokers.

The workers are members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). The employees have been on a no work-no pay strike since April 25 and the lockout was imposed April 28.

According to reports 80 percent of workers at the port are members of three other unions, SATAWU, UTATU and SARWHU, who are continuing to work.

Transnet management demanded the strikers give up their demands before they will be allowed back to work.

Strike by medics at Nigerian hospital set to enter second month

Members of the Medical and Dental Consultants Association are on strike at the Ladoko Akintola University of Technology Teaching Hospital (LAUTECH) in the city of Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria. They are demanding unpaid salaries be paid.

Unions at the hospital have been on strike since the beginning of April and protesting since January. The chairman and secretary of LAUTECH issued a joint statement saying the strike had brought untold hardship to patients, workers and students and urged the government to resolve the crisis and return the hospital to normality.

Protest by Nigerian power workers

The headquarters of Benin Electrical Producing Company (BEPC), in Benin City, part of the recently privatised Power Holding Company of Nigeria, has been brought to a standstill.

Members of National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE) and the Senior Staff Association of Electricity and Allied Companies (SSEAC), have taken protest action in response to the management reneging on agreements. Chairman of NUEE in Edo State, Godwin Idahosa, said that BEPC had refused to honour agreements made with the unions in Edo State on April 9.

Long-running Nigerian education strikes continue

College and polytechnic staff who are continuing their strike were out on the streets protesting that the strike had gone on too long. Members of the College of Education and Academic Staff Union COEASU have been out for five months and the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics ASUP has been striking for eight months.

Students joined the protest, which came under attack from the police with tear gas and water cannons. The workers are also striking in protest at the state of disrepair of the polytechnics and colleges. A lecturer at one of the Colleges of Education, Talala Phibe, said "We want this discrimination that exists among colleges of education, polytechnics, and universities to stop. Citing an example of conditions in class she said, "students stand while writing in class, [there] are no good chairs or tables. It is rather bad that the government has neglected us".

The National Publicity Secretary of ASUP, Chairman Clement added that people who attend polytechnics and colleges of education are mostly the children of the poor.

Strikes by Nigerian electricity supply workers

Rolling strikes are taking place throughout the recently privatised Nigerian electricity companies. The new DISCOs and GENCOs, i.e, electric distribution and generating companies, have sent out sacking notices to the 60 percent of its workforce they plan to sack. It has also introduced an extortionate tariff that is implemented even under circumstances of no supply.

The trade union claims that a policy of de-unionisation is also taking place. The staff have been on a six month probationary period since November with workers expected to receive their notices this week.

Cocoa research workers sacked at Nigerian institute

Following the sacking of 95 mainly junior staff, who were given termination notices by the Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria between February 24 and 27, a campaign has been organised for their reinstatement.

Members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the Campaign for Democratic and Workers Rights (CDWR) are calling for the reinstatement of 95 workers.

The State chapter of CDWR put forward a five-point demand on the institution. They demanded immediate and unconditional reinstatement of the 95, reversal of all forms of anti-worker policies within the institution,

the immediate payment of all outstanding salaries, and the restoration of trade union activities, as well as no harassment of workers by security.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact