

Greek workers stage strike against Syriza-backed austerity measures

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

5 May 2017

## Europe

### Greek workers strike on May Day

Greek workers held a 24-hour strike on May Day to oppose further austerity measures being planned by the Syriza-led Greek government in collaboration with the European Union. The strike saw shops closed, train and ferry services suspended and public services interrupted.

Marches were held in Athens attracting 10,000, with a rally organised outside the Greek parliament building. In Thessaloniki, 3,500 demonstrated.

The General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE), and public sector federation ADEDY, have called a general strike on May 17 to coincide with a Greek parliament vote on the latest austerity programme agreed by the Syriza government this week. Both union federations have worked to contain social discontent and subordinate it to Syriza and the Greek ruling class.

### Polish retail staff stage work to rule action

Around 10,000 Polish retail staff employed at 1,000 outlets, including Auchan, Biedronka, Tesco, Decathlon, Dino and Makro Cash and Carry, as well as Amazon and H&M distribution centres, began a work to rule on Tuesday.

The members of the Solidarity union are seeking a pay increase, improved working conditions and a ban on Sunday opening.

### Further strike by BMW workers in UK

Car workers belonging to the Unite union working at the BMW Hams Hall factory in Birmingham, which makes car engines, held a 24-hour strike on Wednesday. It was part of a series of eight 24-hour strikes called against BMW's intention to get rid of the current defined-benefit pension schemes, replacing them with an inferior defined-contribution scheme.

BMW workers who produce Rolls-Royce cars at its plant in Goodwood, England are striking today. The company has sites at the Cowley plant near Oxford, Swindon and Goodwood in West Sussex as well as the Birmingham site.

Unite members voted by a 93 percent majority on a 72 percent turnout for strikes against the pension changes, which could see some of them lose up to £160,000. The union has done everything possible to prevent a strike and is now seeking to prevent an all-out struggle, instead calling the staggered eight-hour protests.

### Further strikes by cinema staff in UK capital

Cinema staff working for the Picturehouse cinema chain came out on strike on Monday in their ongoing struggle to be paid the London living wage rate.

Workers are also demanding maternity and sick pay and for recognition of the BECTU trade union by the cinema chain. Five cinemas across London owned by the chain were affected. Currently the company only

recognises BECTU at its Ritzy cinema complex.

### Teachers at London school strike against funding cuts

Teachers at Forest Hill School in the London borough of Lewisham held a further strike on Wednesday, their seventh to date with more planned for later this month and in June.

They are opposing cuts in the school budget of £1.3 million being imposed by the Labour-led Lewisham council. The cuts would lead to job losses and affect the quality of teaching at the school.

The main concern of the National Union of Teachers, which organized the strike, is to protect its income from dues paying teachers. Amid mass opposition among teachers to further cuts, the NUT and the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) have called limited strike actions aimed at containing opposition.

### Staff at London railway to strike in defence of sacked colleague

Staff working at London Bridge Tube station will hold a 24-hour strike beginning at 10pm on May 7 to demand the reinstatement of a colleague. The worker was sacked after confronting a passenger trying to evade paying for a ticket. The staff are members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union.

### UK nuclear power construction staff balloted for strike

The 700-strong workforce of construction staff working on the £18 billion Hinkley Point nuclear power station in Somerset are being balloted for possible strike action.

The ballots are being conducted by the GMB and Unite unions, with the result to be announced next week. At issue is the amount of bonus being paid by the Bouygues TP/Laing O'Rourke (BYLOR) consortium that is overseeing construction.

### Finnish retail managers' strike

Shop managers working for the retail chains Kesko, S-group, Stockmann, Oriola pharmacies and Instru Optics held a 12-hour strike on Tuesday. They belong to the Federation of Professional and Managerial Staff (YTN), which is part of the Akava trade union confederation.

The managers are seeking a collective agreement to be negotiated by the YTN and employers' body, the Employers' Finnish Commerce Federation. So far, the employers' federation has refused to negotiate such an agreement.

The managers are due to walk out again on another 12-hour strike today from noon. The strikes are aimed at headquarter operations and are expected to affect systems management operations.

## Middle East

### Egyptian strikers join May Day march

Those marching on May Day in Egypt included workers at Telecom Egypt and Tourah Portland Cement, who are currently on strike. They are demanding a pay increase and are opposing the government crackdown on workers' rights.

The Egyptian government of dictator General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has imposed price rises in response to conditions dictated by the International Monetary Fund as terms for a loan.

#### **Israeli bus drivers set to strike**

Bus drivers working for the Israeli Dan bus company in Be'er Sheva were due to strike on Wednesday, after the Histadrut trade union labour federation called the action. Drivers are seeking a new collective bargaining agreement with the company but negotiations have stalemated.

## **Africa**

#### **Kenyan doctors may strike again**

Kenya doctors in the the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPPDU), are threatening to return to strike action.

The union secretary general said that none of the agreements settling the 100-day strike that began last December have been met. The union accuses governors of victimising its members for striking. He added that the action of some government officials was pushing doctors to restart the strike.

Kenya's president Uhuru Kenyatta had made promises to workers, with an eye on August's general elections, but the state governors are refusing to implement them. During the strike, Kenyatta bitterly denounced the doctors and temporarily jailed several union officials for refusing to end it.

Emboldened by the KMPPDU capitulation on the medics main demand, the implementation of the 2013 collective bargaining agreement, state governors are still holding back on wages and increments due to medical staff.

#### **Liberian oil workers oppose sackings**

The Liberian oil union SYNTEPCI is demanding that the Libyan Oil Company (LOC) reinstate eight workers laid off. The company says the layoffs were because of "economic reasons." The union disputes this.

Liberian labour law states that companies laying off workers have to give good economic reasons to do so.

The union claims the reasons given do not stand up as LOC has expanded its operations in Liberia under a growing economy, and new workers have been employed since the beginning of the year. The union states as evidence that LOC increased its oil production in Liberia in January this year by around 20 per cent on January 2016.

In a dispute in May last year, where 50 workers were illegally laid-off, SYNTEPCI settled for just two workers being reinstated, and 48 given redundancy termination payments.

LOC is implementing the reduction of redundancy payments for laid-off workers, which the union claims it will oppose.

#### **Kenyan ferry workers create traffic jams with go-slow**

Kenyan ferry workers, providing services between the mainland and Mombasa Island, embarked on a go-slow industrial action on April 29. The increased time taken to load and unload passengers and goods on each side of the half kilometre ferry trip caused large traffic hold-ups.

Ferry workers are demanding the implementation of a 17.5 percent wage increase, and increased allowances awarded to them two years ago through the courts.

The strikers also demand the inclusion of casual workers on the company books and that they are paid overtime for working holidays and other allowances.

A spokesman for the 290 workers said he had found that when he had to attend hospital for treatment, he had been refused treatment because the company had not paid his medical insurance payments.

#### **South Africa coal miners' union demand retaining national bargaining**

The South African coal mining industry is facing industrial action over the decentralisation of bargaining. The existing two-year contract ends in June.

A spokesman for the unions in the industry, a member of the minority union Solidarity said, "If we fail to agree something like this then the industry will go on strike, no doubt."

The unions already hold a certificate from the dispute resolution service—the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA)—to carry out industrial action with two days' notice. The CCMA failed to get the coal employers syndicate to accept their recommendations.

The employer's federation, the Chamber of Mines, has arbitrarily decided to pull out of national negotiations and agreed that its members would negotiate independently.

The inclusion of the CCMA came out of a dispute called by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), against the employers' move to pit-by-pit negotiations. The compromise resolution from CCMA for one more year of industry-wide negotiations was thrown out by the Chamber of Mines.

It is suspected that a major reason for the Chamber of Mines' resistance to compromise is the move by power stations towards the use of renewable fuels.

The miners' unions in South Africa have a long history of betrayal, with the companies using them to quell working class opposition. Most notoriously, the NUM participated directly in the violent suppression of the wildcat strike of miners in Marikana in August 2012.

#### **South African Airline union appeals against strike ban**

Airline workers at South Africa's largest operator, South African Airways (SAA), were sent back to work, with the union giving way to a court order banning the strike.

The union, South African Cabin Crew Association (SACCA), is hoping to repeal the decision and return to industrial action, although talks have resumed with SAA.

Cabin crew members came out on strike demanding an increase in allowances when on overseas flights.

Their allowances for hotel and meals in other countries are not enough, on some occasions. Cabin crew staff claim they have to go without meals because the allowance does not stretch to both hotel rooms and meals.

SACCA has put in an appeal to the courts, which they hoped would have been heard by Wednesday of this week.

#### **10,000 thousand Tanzanian civil service workers purged**

Nearly 10,000 Tanzanian civil servants were given a warning on April 29 that unless they vacate their posts within 10 days they face seven years in jail.

The government claims 2.4 percent of civil servants are in their post with false qualifications and will not continue to pay their salaries, starting this month.

An evaluation of 435,000 civil servants has been concluded, with the 10,000 civil servants to lose their jobs described by President John Magufulias as robbers and shoplifters.



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