

Greek anti-austerity strike, Ukraine workers walk out against ArcelorMittal

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

19 May 2017

Series of strikes in Greece against further austerity measures

Greek ferry workers began a four-day strike Tuesday, cutting off the many Greek islands from the mainland. Journalists also held a strike with no newspapers being published. Bus drivers in Thessaloniki, Greece's second city, walked out over wages arrears.

On Wednesday, the action widened out to a general strike, with the public-sector union GSEE and the private sector union ADEDY joining the action with a big demonstration in Athens. OIYE (Hellenic Federation of Private Sector Employees) and POEDIN (Public Hospital Workers Union) also joined in the general strike action on Wednesday.

On Wednesday, air traffic control staff struck for four hours in the middle of the day leading to the disruption of around 150 flights. Public hospitals were hit, with only emergency cover being provided. Government offices across the country were closed or impacted. Public transport was hit bus drivers coming out, continuing their strike until Friday. Police attacked youth demonstrating against budget cuts and mass unemployment.

The strike was to protest the imposition of further austerity measures, including cuts to pensions and tax rises, by the Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) led government, which came to power in 2015 promising to oppose austerity.

Joint protests by Ukrainian miners and steel workers

Iron ore miners at two mines along with steelworkers from the ArcelorMittal plant in the Ukrainian city of Kriviy Rih have been holding joint protests to push for substantial pay increases. The protests are under the direction of the Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine (NPGU). The miners are seeking an immediate 20 percent pay rise, with an increase to 30 percent by August.

Over 1,000 steel workers from the ArcelorMittal factory held a rally on May 11 to demand a pay rise and to protest the outsourcing of jobs at the steel plant. Iron ore miners have previously held an underground hunger strike in support of their demands.

Romanian finance workers walk out

20,000 staff working for the Romanian Finance Ministry walked out on strike Monday. The workers, members of the Sed Lex trade union, are

protesting draft legislation that would cut their pay between 10 and 35 percent.

UK nurses vote to hold strike ballot

Nurses belonging to the Royal College of Nursing have voted by nearly 80 percent in a consultative vote in favour of holding a full ballot of all the 270,000 members over the summer to authorize strike action.

Nurses are protesting the string of low pay rises or freezes since 2010. According to the RCN nurses have suffered a 14 percent cut in real wages because of the Tory government's cap on public sector pay. That the RCN was forced to organise a ballot at all is a measure of the anger of nurses against the attack on National Health Service (NHS). If a strike goes ahead it would be the first strike in the RCN's history. The RCN, along with all the other health unions, stood by while the junior doctors held their series of strikes, helping to isolate and defeat their struggle.

Action by UK rail staff

The Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union has announced a 24-hour strike at three rail companies over the use of driver operated only (DOO) trains. The strike, which is set to take place on 30 May, would be the 32nd "day of action" at Govia Thameslink Railways-owned Southern Rail over the last year.

Northern (Arriva Rail North) and Merseyrail are also pushing for DOO, while Southern Rail has already replaced train guards with on-board supervisors (OBS) who have no responsibility for closing doors. Talks between RMT and Southern Rail broke down Monday after the company announced plans to run 8,000 trains without an OBS, or essentially as DOO. The train drivers' union ASLEF (Associated Society of Locomotive Steam Enginemen and Firemen) has announced an overtime ban for the end of May over the DOO issue.

In a separate conflict, RMT members working for Arriva TrainCare, which maintains Arriva trains, were set to strike today in a pay dispute. The RMT and ASLEF have blocked any unified struggle by rail workers because it would quickly lead to a direct confrontation with the hated Tory government.

Union suspends UK automakers action over pensions

The Unite union has suspended planned strikes by BMW car workers in the UK over plans by the company to get rid of the current pension scheme, replacing it with an inferior one at the end of this month.

Eight strikes had been planned at four BMW sites in Oxford, West Sussex, Swindon and Birmingham in April and May. Four of the strikes have taken place but following talks, Unite has suspended the strike after BMW reportedly came up with an offer, the details of which have not been released. The workforce will now consider the offer.

UK restaurant staff protest sacking

Eleven staff working for the fashionable Beach Blanket Babylon (BBB) restaurant in east London have been holding protests outside each night since they were summarily sacked last week. They were sacked after raising concerns over wage arrears and complaining of anomalies in sick and gratuity payments.

Scottish college lecturers take strike action

College lecturers in Scotland, members of the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), held a 48-hour strike this week over their fight for equal pay for lecturers performing the same role in different colleges. The EIS accuses Colleges Scotland of reneging on a national agreement meant to resolve the equal pay issue.

UK Equality Commission staff hold further strikes

Staff working for the UK government Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), members of the Unite and the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) unions, have walked out to demand the reinstatement of eight workers who were sacked for striking in February against plans to cut EHRC jobs.

After the unions suspended the strikes to allow the government conciliation service ACAS to intervene and head off the anger of workers, the EHRC sacked eight staff members in messages sent by email. EHRC staff in Glasgow were on strike on Monday and another four days of strikes will take place over the next three weeks at EHRC offices in London, Cardiff and Manchester.

UK warehouse staff begin two-week strike

Around 1,400 warehouse staff working for the retail store Argos began a two-week strike on Wednesday in Basildon, Bridgewater, Burton-on-Trent, Heywood and Lutterworth. The Unite union called the strike after Argos announced plans to outsource 500 of its Lutterworth warehouse workers to Wincanton logistics in Kettering. Argos would not guarantee that transferred workers would retain their current pay and conditions or that those workers refusing to move would retain their jobs.

Teachers at London school strike against budget cuts

Members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) at Forest Hill School in southeast London struck Tuesday against proposed job cuts stemming from the school budget being imposed by the Tory government. It was the eighth such day of action.

Teachers also engaged in three days of strikes at the nearby Plumstead Manor School in Greenwich, which also wanted to impose 34 job cuts because of budget restrictions. The union ended the action after the Labour-controlled Greenwich council reached an agreement to extend its debt repayment period and halved the number of proposed layoffs. The NUT presented this as a victory.

Nigerian oil workers strike Exxon Mobil

Strikers at Exxon Mobil Nigeria extended their strike on Monday with three days of strike action involving the Petroleum and Natural Gas Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) national membership. The strike against mass sackings has also spread to Chevron, Shell and Eni.

One hundred and fifty workers have been sacked, over half of them PENGASSAN members, at Exxon Mobil. Strikes by Exxon workers in Nigeria at the end of 2016 impacted output, leading to weeks-long loading delays.

Nigerian teachers in fight

Primary school teachers in the Nigerian state of Bayelsa have been on strike a week to demand unpaid wages for the last nine and half months. The walkout by members of the National Union of Teachers has paralysed primary school education across the state.

Meanwhile, the state governor of Nasarawa, Nigeria, has banned the Academic Staff Union of Secondary Schools (ASUSS) from continuing a week-long strike and protest. The governor claims the union's actions seriously threaten peace and stability in the state. He also states that the union is unregistered and is interfering with school examinations.

In the Nasarawa state, civil servants plan to strike over the governor's broken promise to pay back wages. The Nigerian Labour Congress, discredited among its members for its constant sell-outs, removed the branch chair and called a statewide strike on May 12.

Nigerian truck drivers strike over dangerous road conditions

Nigerian truck drivers are prepared to strike in three weeks if the conditions of Lagos port roads are not substantially improved. The Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria says the deplorable state of the roads threatens the lives of its members. The federal government responded, with support from private industries, pledging N4.3billion (US\$13.27 million) to upgrade to the motorways into the ports within two months.

South African gold miners return to work

South African miners at Central Rand Gold have returned to work after a demand for a wage increase was converted into an agreement to pay a 13th-month bonus. The bonus is said to worth 50 percent of workers' wages and will be paid at the end of the year in December.

Prior to the agreement the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) was brought in without success. The union agreed to CCMA restrictions on picketing, which allowed strikebreaking to take place as some miners went into work, providing a skeleton staff. The company lost five days of production because of the 11-day strike.

Kenyan civil servants threaten strike after bank steals wages to pay tax debt

Kenyan's Nairobi state employees threatened to withdraw their labour if April's wages were not paid by Tuesday. The Central Bank of Kenya (CBK) reportedly took the workers' money to make a partial payment on the bank's three-billion Kenyan shillings debt to the Kenyan Revenues Authority (KRA).

The funds were tax payments made by workers into the bank but not transferred to the KRA. It is reported that the Nairobi state has received a further KS 1.02 billion (US\$9.9m) from central government to cover the redirected wages.

A Nairobi county lawyer claims that CBN and the KRA ignored a court order barring the funds transaction and is calling for the jailing of their managing directors. In the most recent report the Kenyan County Government Workers Union says it has not received their wages and the protest and strike of between 12,000 and 13,000 workers will go ahead.

Authorities renege on deal to end 100-day Kenyan doctor strike

Kenyan doctors are still waiting for state governments to implement the agreed return-to-work formula, which contained payments for the 100-day strike by the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union.

The council of governors are demanding the funding for the strike period be paid by central government, while claiming that the saved revenues on unpaid wages were paid out for other demands. Doctors have not yet returned to work in some counties and are returning to striking in others.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact