

Workers to stand against Government's strict economic planning

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) representing workers in 23 countries called for solidarity action, protesting against austerity plans under way and on the horizon

But sceptics feel these demonstrations are an exercise in futility, recalling the trade unions congress in Athens in May 2011, where representatives expressed their rejection of austerity planning and the economic governance policies pursued by European governments and the European Commission. ETUC was born in 1973 and has 85 member organisations today in 36 European countries from west to east. Among the main aims: lobby the European decision-making process, negotiate with employers keeping social dialogue open and coordinate union actions.

But the complexities of harmonising are vast. Conditions from country to country are enormously different. Population sizes, geography and administrative systems can make it so what one area wants is the opposite of another. The unions say this is a

social emergency. With official EU statistics showing a shocking wealth disparity earlier this year — Luxembourgers have on average seven times greater purchasing power than the people of Bulgaria — it's feared that failure to correct faulty distribution of wealth will provoke a worse future.

They are calling it the European Day of Action and Solidarity against Austerity. They said it was the first time strike action has been held simultaneously across four countries: general strikes in Spain and Portugal and ad hoc stoppages Greece and Italy.

As well as strikes in southern Europe, demonstrations to show solidarity are planned for many other countries including France and Germany. In Madrid, union leader Candido Méndez told the crowd that their situation has its roots in European politics. "The policy has been imposed on us by



During a protest against austerity in Lisbon

the Commission," he said, "who are following orders from Berlin and the head of the Spanish government not only accepts this but takes it even further. Local transport, airports and schools are affected. In total, 40 trade union organisations from 23 countries are involved in the day's events. In Portugal, this is the second general strike this year. "We have begun

this fight not only for the rights of workers," says a union representative, "but also to defend the rights of generations to come, for the rights of our children, we are also fighting for the future of our country." Municipal workers have also come out on strike in Portugal. The country is said to be going through its worst slump since the 1970s.

Lack of airport capacity costs UK £14bn

A lack of capacity at Heathrow is costing the UK economy £14bn a year in lost trade, according to a report published by the airport

Heathrow bosses are keen to see a third runway built at the west London airport, but the government has ruled it out for the time being. The government has asked a commission headed by Sir Howard Davies to advise on future UK airport capacity needs. The Davies Commission is expected to present an interim report to the government by the end of 2013, with a full report due in the summer of 2015 — after the next general election.

Heathrow's report, 'One hub or none', was prepared for the airport by consultants Frontier Economics. It was commissioned to inform Heathrow's response to the Davies Commission but is not its formal submission.

Olympus back in profit as it recovers from scandals

Olympus returned to profit in the six months to the end of September as it recovered from its accounting scandal

The camera and medical equipment maker reported net profit of 8.02bn yen (\$101m; £63m) compared with a loss of 32bn yen in the same period last year.



The profit was partly due to the sale of some subsidiaries but its medical systems unit also made a profit. The camera business made a loss as a result of the strong yen and popularity of camera-equipped smartphones. The strong yen is bad news for Japanese exporters because it makes their products more expensive overseas. In November last year, Olympus admitted to hiding billions of yen of losses over 20 years in one of Japan's biggest corporate scandals.

The company and three of its former executives were charged by prosecutors in March in connection with the scandal. Olympus is engaged in a five-year restructuring plan, which will involve reducing its global workforce by 7 percent by 2014 and cutting the number of its factories around the world from 30 to 18 by 2015.

Intelligent motor tyres

Italian tyre manufacturer Pirelli has launched a new product — Cyber Fleet is an intelligent tyre designed for lorries that uses an electronic sensor to supply real-time data on the tyre's condition and the vehicle's geographical position

The Tyre Mounted Sensor (TMS) transmits information about the tyre to a control unit inside the vehicle. Having it correctly inflated ensures good steering, braking and cornering, as well as lowering running costs by cutting fuel consumption and extending the tyre's lifespan.

The system transmits data to the truck driver and fleet manager who can then carry out diagnostics and repairs, guaranteeing maximum safety for each heavy vehicle. Interpreting the data is not left solely to the truck driver — the fleet manager can organise the safety of the entire fleet from a remote position.

Pirelli is already testing its first generation of Cyber Tyre on lorries in Brazil.

Australia solar eclipse delights thousands



Tourists watching rare total solar eclipse in Australia

Tens of thousands of tourists and astronomers gathered in northern Australia to glimpse a rare total solar eclipse

The eclipse, which occurs when the Moon passes between the Earth and the Sun, plunged parts of Queensland into darkness for just

over two minutes. Estimates suggest the event was viewed live by millions.

A partial eclipse was expected in other parts of the region, including New Zealand and eastern Indonesia. The next total solar eclipse will not take place until March 2015. On-

lookers gathered at vantage points, in boats and on hot air balloons to witness the rare phenomenon.

There had been fears that cloudy weather would obscure the eclipse but the clouds parted just as it began, drawing cheers from the crowd as the full spectacle came into view.

"Immediately before, I was thinking, 'Are we gonna see this?' And we just had a fantastic display — it was just beautiful," said Terry Cuttle, from the Astronomical Association of Queensland.

Scientists were set to use footage from underwater cameras at the Great Barrier Reef to investigate creatures' reactions to the eclipse. Australian tour operators welcomed the surge in holiday-makers, with reports of some hotels being booked up more than three years in advance. State officials estimate that over 50,000 extra people visited Queensland to experience the phenomenon.