

Czech public workers on strike, government firm

Czech public sector workers went on strike against the government's austerity measures

Unions have resisted the centre-right government's plans to cut the public sector wage bill by 10 percent next year, saying they expected one-sixth of the country's 600,000 public sector workers to join the one-day strike.

"I want my pay to be at least at the current level, even if it is not enough," librarian Jan Broum, 35, said in the closed national library building where many employees had gone on strike. "I want the government to find resources somewhere else — implement progressive taxation, stop wasting public money and do away with corruption," he told.

The country's last general strike was in 1989, when millions of Czechs walked out to protest against the Communist government, one of the decisive moments in the collapse of communist rule in the country. Economists have said this time they do not expect the strike to have a big economic impact.

The Czech Republic's debt is under 40 percent of gross domestic product, about half of the EU average but is expected to rise without reforms. The government wants to cut the public sector deficit to 4.6 percent of gross domestic product from 5.1 percent expected this year. Walkouts are very rare in the Czech



Two protesters blow their whistles as several hundred public sector workers attend a rally

Republic, where union membership has shrunk to about 600,000 of 4 million workers.

A number of schools were closed and some hospitals reduced service, however many workers only declared support for the strike's aims without stopping work. A wave of labour protests has swept through Europe as governments sharply slash

spending to calm markets and narrow budget deficits inflated by the economic crisis.

The unions said they may build up pressure by calling a general strike at a later date unless the government softens the plan for job losses and wage cuts. The cabinet, elected on a programme of cutting the budget deficit below 3 percent by 2013 and reform-

ing the pension, health and welfare systems, rejected to climb down on the wage plan. "We did not win our mandate to sit and wait until clerks from international institutions start putting our public sector finances in order, as is happening in some EU countries," Prime Minister Petr Necas said. "We are not afraid of unpopular steps, we are ready to make them."

Google unveils Chrome OS notebook

Google has delayed the launch of its much anticipated laptop, powered by its Chrome operating system, until 2011

Instead, Google announced a pilot programme aimed at people who 'live on the web'. Chrome OS is Google's boldest bid yet to challenge Microsoft's market dominance with Windows software.

Google has already gone after Microsoft's Office software with its Google Docs product. Chrome marks a departure from traditional operating systems, such as Mac OS X and Windows, by targeting users who spend most of their time on the web. "We think cloud computing will define computing as we know it," said Eric Schmidt, Google's chief executive officer. "Finally there is a viable third choice for an operating system."

Google's Sundar Pichai said the pilot scheme is aimed at early adopters, developers and users who are used to using beta software. They will be given an unbranded black notebook, called the Cr-48. Mr. Pichai said there would be no devices on sale until next year simply because the software was not ready for prime time, due to a number of bugs and unfinished features.

"This is a profound shift," said Mr. Pichai, claiming that the operating system is Google's attempt to 're-think the personal experience for the modern web'.

Birds of America sets sales record at Sotheby's



A Sotheby's employee poses with a page depicting an Snowy Owl

A rare copy of John James Audubon's *Birds of America*, billed as the world's most expensive book, has sold for more than £7m at auction

The copy, which comes from the collection of Lord Hesketh, had been expected to fetch up to £6m. Only 119 complete copies of the 19th century book are known to exist, and 108 are owned by museums and libraries.

A separate edition of the book on ornithology sold for a record-breaking price of \$8.8m (£5.7m) a decade ago. It contains 1,000 life-sized illustrations of almost 500 breeds and took wildlife artist John James Audubon 12 years to complete. He did so by travelling across America, shooting the

birds and then hanging them on bits of wire to paint them. The artist then went to Britain to print the volumes and targeted the rich to buy copies.

London dealer Michael Tolle-mache, who bought the copy at the Sotheby's auction, said the book was 'priceless'. Lord Hesketh's collection also included a rare copy of Shakespeare's *First Folio*, which Sotheby's said was 'the most important book in all of English Literature'. Of the 750 that were probably printed, only 219 are known to exist today. The copy, which dates back to 1827 and has three pages missing, sold for £1.5m. It is one of only three textually complete copies to exist in private hands in a comparably early binding.

Designers invent airbag for cyclists

A new bicycle helmet designed in Sweden activates an airbag that encases and protects the head within seconds

The helmet is wrapped around the neck like a scarf. It's not cheap, but it is safe and its inventors even claim that it benefits your hairstyle. "Our aim was to invent an invisible bicycle helmet that won't ruin your hairstyle. And now it's here," Anna Haupt says, with a note of pride in her voice. The Swedish woman and her partner, Terese Alstin, will launch

the new helmet called the 'Hovding' (the Chief) onto the Scandinavian market in 2011.

The helmet, which looks like a neck collar, is equipped with sensors that can deploy the airbag hidden inside so that it covers and protects the head in the event of any unexpected movements. The Swedish industrial designers were set the task of creating an invisible bicycle helmet as part of their diploma studies at the University of Lund. They spent six years researching, refining and test-

ing it.

"We want to target cyclists who don't use a helmet because they feel constrained by wearing one or they're worried about their hairstyle," Haupt says. The helmet only deploys itself in the event of a real fall and not if you turn the bike suddenly or collide with the edge of a footpath. Cyclists outside Scandinavia will have to wait awhile before they can purchase the airbag helmet due to 'very different bicycle behavioural patterns in different countries', Haupt says.

Lennon celebrated on anniversary

John Lennon fans have sung his songs, laid flowers and lit candles on the 30th anniversary of the Beatle's death

Vigils have been held in New York, where the music legend was shot dead, and his home city of Liverpool. His widow Yoko Ono played a concert in Tokyo, while gatherings have also taken place in cities from Prague to Havana.

The musician was 40 years old when he was killed by crazed fan Mark Chapman outside the Dakota Building in Manhattan. In Liverpool, several hundred people with candles and glowsticks braved cold temperatures to sing Lennon songs and listen to poetry inspired by the late *Beatle*. The vigil was held next

to a peace monument that was unveiled by his first wife Cynthia and son Julian in October and has been dedicated to John Lennon.

A giant photograph of John with Julian watched over the crowd, alongside a banner bearing the name of one of John's signature songs, *Give Peace A Chance*.

In New York, hundreds of fans gathered in Central Park, near the spot where Lennon was shot. Flowers were laid in the Strawberry Fields area, which was converted to a memorial garden after his death. Ono performed at a charity concert in Japan called *Dream Power John Lennon Super Live*, which raises money for schools for deprived children all over the world. "On this tragic anniversary please



join me in remembering John with deep love and respect," she said in a statement. "In his short lived life of 40 years, he has given so much to the world. The world was lucky to have known him."

Their son Sean, now a musician, used Twitter to respond to the tributes to his father. "Thank you for all the kind words," he said. "Let's all just pray for peace on earth. That's what he cared about most."

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