

# Greek unions fight airline shake-up

Helena Smith in Athens

**G**REEK trade unions vowed to launch the "mother of all battles" last night against government plans to restructure the ailing national airline.

Thousands of travellers flying in and out of Greek airports will be stranded for at least 72 hours as striking Olympic Airways employees lead the battle.

Under legislation to be presented to parliament today staff are being told to accept drastic cost-cutting measures, including a three-year wage freeze, or see the airline fold.

The corporation founded by Aristotle Onassis in 1957 posted losses last year of £12.5 million.

The prime minister, Costas Simitis, says Olympic has become the test case of his government's determination to apply policies

that will bring Greece into line with its richer European Union partners.

The airline is the first public enterprise to be overhauled since Greece, the EU's poorest member, entered the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (EMU) last month, starting the long haul to joining the single currency.

By the end of 1999, the Socialist government plans to have privatised a further 11 struggling state-owned

companies. Yannis Papanioliou, the economy minister, has likened the industrial action at Olympic to the 1985 miners' strike in Britain, saying it will be the "showcase struggle" between the government and a workforce spoilt by social benefits.

This week's industrial action will climax on Thursday when workers stage a general strike, as MPs vote on the Olympic Airways bill.

