

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

19 April 2013

Teachers locked out in Denmark

Some 55,000 teachers and up to 880,000 students remain locked out from their schools by municipal employers, after teachers threw out changes to their working conditions.

The lockout was imposed on April 1 as part of national negotiations between employers and public sector unions on pay and conditions. The assault on the teachers is backed by the Social Democrat-led coalition government.

Municipal employers are demanding teachers work longer hours and spend less time on preparatory work.

A demonstration in the capital Copenhagen last Thursday saw more than 40,000 teachers participate.

Germany: Deutsche Post in warning strikes

Postal workers at Deutsche Post in several states, including Baden-Württemberg, Berlin, Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia and Rhineland Palatinate, went on warning strikes Wednesday for higher wages.

The 132,000 postal employees on Deutsche Post contracts are demanding a 6 percent pay increase.

The strikes were called by service-sector union Verdi, which had been unsuccessful in striking an agreement with the postal operator's management in two previous rounds of negotiations.

Britain: London Tube workers to ballot for industrial action

Workers on the Piccadilly Line on London Underground (LU) are to be balloted for industrial action in an ongoing dispute over working conditions.

It comes on the heels of a call for a ban on Tube drivers going on strike by the London Assembly Conservative group.

A report by the right-wing group claimed that Tube strikes cost the economy £48 million a day and that around £1 billion had been lost due to industrial action between 2005 and 2009.

Thousands protest before Italian parliament

On Tuesday, thousands of workers protested in front of the parliament in

Rome, demanding extra resources for the welfare fund that provides for around 700,000 jobless.

Under the *Cassa integrazione in deroga* (Cig) scheme, employees are temporarily laid off and receive part of their regular wage paid jointly by the employer and the government. The scheme is aimed at massaging unemployment figures, which officially stands at around 3 million.

Italy remains without a government since elections in February saw a mass rejection of government and European Union demands for greater austerity.

Greek seamen in 24-hour strike for jobs, contracts

On Tuesday, seamen in Greece went on a 24-hour strike against plans to reduce some ferry services that they say will threaten jobs.

The workers are also demanding that employers sign collective labour agreements, which have expired.

The dispute involved all commercial vessels, and the action coincided with the opening of the parliamentary debate on draft legislation tabled by the marine ministry.

Greek islands were left without ferry links with the mainland.

Greek civil servants demonstrate in Athens

On Wednesday, hundreds of civil servants demonstrated outside the civil administration ministry in Athens against plans by the government to cut thousands of state jobs this year to meet austerity goals at the behest of international creditors.

The government has pledged to cut 4,000 state-sector jobs this year and 11,000 in 2014 to qualify for €8.8 billion (US\$11.5 billion) in loans from the troika of the European Union, International Monetary Fund, and European Central Bank next month.

Greek health workers protest government cutbacks

Health workers in Greece took industrial action Wednesday to protest the consequences of government cutbacks. Doctors, nurses, hospital staff and ambulance drivers participated in the action outside the Ministry of Health.

Since government "reforms" in 2010, there have been increasing supply and drug shortages in hospitals, as well as cuts to staff wages, overtime

pay, and jobs, resulting in understaffing, and hospitals have been shut down.

Hospitals have also experienced an inevitable increase of new unemployed patients who have lost their health care insurance and cannot pay for health care.

A nurse, Zoe Florou, was quoted by *Reuters*: “What I am afraid of is the tsunami of poor and homeless people who flood the hospital clinics every night, and you don’t have enough time to treat them. And most of all, they don’t have free medical care.... It is unacceptable and I cannot accept the idea that a person cannot have free medical care. Don’t they understand that this is an issue of human survival?”

Romanian rail workers take action over unpaid wages

Some 2,000 workers on Romanian railways company CFR, working at the locomotive service units, went on strike across the country Wednesday due to not having received their wages. *Romania Insider* wrote, “Employees had previously been told they would receive the money on Monday; then a one-day delay was announced, and eventually on Wednesday news came that the company had wired the money, but the banks had frozen their accounts.

“This happens just one day after the private manager of CFR, Dimitris Sophocleous resigned after the company’s board rejected the revised management plan the leadership team had drafted. He cites political reasons for the rejection, as finances had improved. Sophocleous was one of the first private managers appointed at the helm of state-owned companies, as the country had agreed with its financier, the International Monetary Fund (IMF).”

Workers in Damietta, Egypt, march against rising prices

Two thousand workers in the Egyptian port town Damietta marched from the Chamber of Commerce building to the office of the governor in protest at rising prices.

Damietta, the capital of the governorate of the same name, is an important port town and home to a number of factories making goods for the domestic and international market.

Egypt has seen a large increase in prices recently, with inflation rising by 8.2 percent in March 2013 compared to March 2012, according to the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics.

Egyptian rail workers in national strike

Hundreds of railway drivers began a nationwide strike in Egypt Sunday to demand improved working conditions.

Drivers are seeking a monthly bonus and have rejected a 10 percent pay rise, due to start next month.

The strike began a day after representatives of the Railway Workers Union met with Transport Minister Hatem Abdel-Latif. The striking drivers also call for the dismissal of Hussein Zakaria, head of the National Railway Authority (NRA).

The strike paralysed trains on all major lines. Egyptian railways employ around 100,000 workers and carry some 50 million passengers annually,

according to the NRA. **Africa**

Kenyan council workers protest arrears

Around 140 workers employed by Awendo town council in southwest Kenya went out on strike last Friday. The workers, members of the Kenya Local Government Workers Union, are protesting arrears of wages amounting to Sh48.5 million (US\$580,000) they are owed following a collective bargaining agreement negotiated in 2010. They picketed the town clerk’s office denying him access.

Tunisian teachers oppose privatisation

Teachers in Tunis held a one-day strike Wednesday to be followed by another next Thursday.

The teachers, members of the primary school teachers’ section of the UGTT (Tunisian General Workers’ Union), are protesting low pay, the growing privatisation of education and the deterioration of the universal state education system. They say a two-tier education system is being created. In the private sector, class sizes are around 30, but in the public sector, they can be 60 or even 70.

Togo students support striking teachers

Teachers in Togo have been on strike for more than a week demanding improved working conditions. Last week, thousands of pupils marched in the capital Lome in support of the striking teachers.

On Monday, armed police used live fire on students demonstrating in the town of Dapaong at the northern tip of Togo, killing one and wounding another. Following the demonstration and shooting, all primary and secondary schools in Lome were closed.

South African hospital and university workers protest

Hospital workers, members of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers’ Union (NEHAWU) employed by Netcare, began a nationwide strike on Tuesday in support of an 11 percent pay increase against the employer’s 7.2 percent offer.

Netcare is the largest private hospital group in South Africa.

The same day, staff at the University of South Africa walked out on strike in support of an 11.7 percent pay increase as against the employer’s offer of just 5.6 percent. They are also protesting the university’s use of labour brokers.



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