

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

6 December 2013

EADS aerospace workers protest in Germany

On November 28, more than 20,000 workers protested throughout Germany in opposition to restructuring plans by European aerospace company EADS, which could result in thousands of job losses.

The firm, part-owned by the French and German governments, is restructuring based on claims that it is necessary in order to remain competitive and double profit levels.

The company employs 140,000 employees globally, of which about 50,000 are in Germany. At risk of closure is the Manching site in Bavaria, which relies on future orders for the Eurofighter jet. EADS will announce its plans on December 9.

Portuguese subway/postal workers strike

Subway staff in Lisbon struck November 28 to oppose salary cuts and other austerity measures. Postal workers also struck last week opposing privatization of the national mail service. Pickets clashed with police as they tried to prevent mail leaving a Lisbon distribution centre.

Doctors in Greece continue strike

On Wednesday doctors at EOPYY, Greece's largest health care provider, voted to continue their strike in opposition to job cuts and attacks on public health care.

The doctors voted to continue the action until December 13 and rejected a proposal from the New Democracy/PASOK government for a one-month delay before medical staff are moved into a mobility scheme, which includes forced transfers and job losses.

The strike has not affected emergency care at hospitals, but has resulted in longer waiting times for medical appointments.

Workers at Greece's largest university, the University of Athens, and at the National Technical University and Aristotle University in Thessaloniki continued their 13-week strike this week. The universities have been closed since the beginning of the autumn semester.

The government plans to suspend more than 1,300 university employees under the labour mobility scheme, with more than half facing the termination of their employment. The two oldest universities in Greece, the University of Athens and the National Technical University, are to be hardest hit. At University of Athens, 498 of its 1,337 employees in technical and administrative positions are threatened. Many departments, including physics, chemistry and ICT, will be left with no administrative

staff.

A female administration worker at Aristotle University, on learning of her inclusion on the list of suspended workers, attempted to commit suicide by jumping from a seventh floor window at the university, but was prevented by staff who were able to restrain her.

On Monday, Education Minister Constantinos Arvanitopoulos Monday ceased all talks with representatives. *Kathemerini* reported that he referred University of Athens "rector Theodosios Pelegrinis to a disciplinary council for dereliction of duty."

Arvanitopoulos warned, "Discussions with the administrative staff of Athens University will continue only under one condition: that they are back at their desks tomorrow".

He added, "In contrast to the rectors of the other seven universities that will be affected by the labour mobility scheme, Pelegrinis is keeping the institution closed with his inertia and his inability to enforce the decisions of the council".

Greek secondary school teachers protest threatened education cuts

Greek teachers, members of the OLME secondary school union, protested at the Education Ministry Thursday. The action was held during a strike called by the union between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. Teachers are protesting government plans to close schools and are demanding more staff are hired.

The government plans to move many teachers to other public sector positions under the labour mobility scheme.

Early this year the government issued civil mobilisation orders to break a strike involving over 88,000 teachers. Since the imposition of austerity measures began in Greece in 2008, these orders have been used with increasing frequency to outlaw industrial action, in defiance of Greece's own constitution, which states that labour may never be coerced.

UK universities and college staff strike

Staff including academics, cleaners, administrators, library and support staff at universities and colleges across Britain held a second one-day strike Tuesday in opposition to a 1 percent pay offer. The offer represents a 13 percent pay cut in real terms since 2008.

The university workers are represented by the University and College Union (UCU), UNISON and UNITE. The unions previously called another token one-day strike October 31. This time they were joined by the Educational Institute of Scotland. According to UNISON, around 4,000 of its members working in universities earn less than the living

wage of £7.65 (£8.80 in London).

According to reports, students at Edinburgh, Goldsmiths, Birmingham, Liverpool, Sheffield, Exeter, Sussex and Ulster supported striking staff by holding occupations at their universities.

Michael MacNeil, UCU head of bargaining, said the strike had been called as a last resort.

The National Union of Students urged an end to the dispute, with President Toni Pearce stating, “We need to see the employers getting round the table with the unions and negotiating a fair and sustainable settlement.”

UCU members at further education colleges were called out in a separate dispute Tuesday. They have been offered a 0.7 percent pay deal by employers.

Cyprus trade unions announce demonstration

Trade unions representing farmers, teachers, students and other workers have announced a demonstration against austerity measures imposed by the troika of the EU Commission, the IMF and the European Central Bank.

The demonstration will take place December 14 in Nicosia, with marchers assembling outside the Ministry of Finance and marching to the presidential palace to hand in a petition.

Egyptian steel workers strike

Around 5,000 steel workers, members of the Iron and Steel Union, began a partial strike Monday at the Egyptian Iron and Steel Company’s Helwan factory. They had previously held a sit-in at the factory. They will continue to service the blast furnace, as it would take three months to re-start it if it were closed down.

The workers are demanding the payment of an annual share of profits to which they are due, but which is yet to be paid. They are seeking the removal of the company CEO and withdrawal of threats against their leaders. They had planned to picket the Helwan headquarters in Cairo, but this did not go ahead because of legal problems.

Tunisian workers strike and protest

Tunisian workers held a strike in the southern Tozeur region on November 27 to protest deepening poverty.

During the day a demonstration of several thousand was held in the city of Siliana in which protesters clashed with police.

The main demand of the UGTT union federation is for more state aid for the tourism and agriculture sectors and it is working in partnership with the Utica employers’ federation on this basis.

The UGTT is seeking talks with the Islamist Ennahda party-led coalition government.

Yemeni oil workers strike

Oil workers employed by the Norwegian oil company DNO began a partial strike at the end of last week. DNO employees stopped work in sectors 43 and 32. They are opposing the refusal of the company to give them certain benefits mandatory under Yemeni law. They are also protesting the dismissal of three administrative and eight oilfield staff.

Saudi Arabian government harasses foreign workers

The Saudi government has stepped up the harassment of the estimated 2 million of the 9 million foreign workers deemed to be in the country “illegally”. The 9 million makes up about a third of the population.

Around 6,000 foreign workers, mainly Bangladeshis, employed as street cleaners in Mecca held a five-day strike recently in opposition to the harassment. They only returned to work after their employer agreed to renew contracts and legalise their status.

The crackdown is partly to create jobs for Saudis. While official unemployment is currently around 12 percent, it is reported around a quarter of Saudi youth are unemployed.

Palestinian West Bank teachers strike

Teachers in Ramallah began a strike on Sunday demanding increases in pay and better conditions and against the Palestinian Authority’s (PA) neglect of the education sector.

On Tuesday the Palestinian Supreme Court ruled the strike illegal and ordered the teachers back to work. However, teachers have continued their strike. In response the PA has threatened action against the union’s leader, to cut the wages of strikers and draw up a list of replacement staff if they do not return to work after 15 days.

Israeli paper workers face job losses

On Monday the Histadrut labour federation filed a motion in court in an attempt to stop the Hadera Paper company laying off 250 workers and closing one of its factories.

Employees at the factory went on strike November 29 in opposition to the company’s attempts to stop their 4.5 percent pay rise and bonuses. Negotiations between Histadrut and the company are continuing.

Africa

Zimbabwean miners put in claim

The Associate Mine Workers Union representing diamond, platinum and gold miners has put in a pay claim. It is demanding \$800 a month for those mining diamonds, \$700 a month for those mining platinum, and \$573 a month for gold miners. Currently the minimum wage for miners in Zimbabwe is set at \$227 a month.

Zimbabwe media workers go unpaid

Staff working for Alpha Media Holdings (AMH), which publishes *Newsday*, the *Standard* and the *Zimbabwe Independent*, have not yet received their November salaries. Benefits such as medical aid and mobile phone allowances have also been cut.

Employees at the *Zimbabwe Independent* have threatened to go on strike. An AMH employee told reporters that the chief executive had recently warned of the company facing challenges and that payment of salaries may have to be staggered.

Sierra Leone dockers protest against trade union leader

Police were called to intervene as dockers in Freetown protested as their union leader Abdul Kanasieu tried to enter the union offices. His term of office expired on November 8 and elections for a successor are due December 6.

The port workers were furious that Kanasieu had gone against a Sierra Leone Labour Congress decision that he not be allowed to access the offices until the elections on December 6.

They hold Kanasieu responsible for poor conditions of service, the non-availability of safety gear, lack of accident cover and of colluding with management of port companies to make unauthorised deductions from wages. They accuse him of failing to keep them informed of salient developments. They do not want him to contest the upcoming election.

Kenyan civil servants threaten strike in New Year

The Union of Kenya Civil Servants (UKCS) has threatened strike action in the New Year if the government does not reverse a November 22 cabinet decision to freeze new hiring, salaries and carry out a review of allowances. The government claims it needs to contain the growing wage bill.

UKCS Secretary General Tom Odege stated the service was already understaffed, with an average vacancy rate of around 41 percent. In some departments such as health and agriculture the vacancy rate is more than 50 percent.

Zambian striking nurses dismissed

Around 150 striking nurses at the Lusaka University Teaching Hospital (UTH) have been sent dismissal letters. Originally around 230 nurses out of the UTH complement of over 800 were involved in the unofficial action, which began on November 22 in pursuit of a pay rise. Of these nearly 70 have returned to work. The leader of the Zambia National Union of Nurses, Tom Yungana, denounced the action and had called on them to return to work.

Nigerian lectures to continue strike

The nationwide strike by lecturers, members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities, has now entered its sixth month. They are demanding the federal government implement its 2009 agreement to improve conditions and pour money into university infrastructure.

They defied a government warning to dismiss them if they do not return to work this week. An adviser to Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan denounced lecturers as “enemies of the state.”

Nigerian public sector workers in Edo state strike

The Edo state chapter of the Nigerian Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress called on its members in Edo state to strike Monday.

This was in response to several issues, including the Edo state’s government refusal to implement the salary relativity structure, the non-payment to health workers of the balance of 20 percent of the Consolidated Health Salary Structure, and non-implementation of the balance of a special teacher allowance.



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