

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

14 March 2014

## Europe

### Greek civil servants in 24-hour strike

Thousands of Greek civil servants held a 24-hour strike Wednesday to protest government plans to fire 11,400 public sector workers this year and a total of 25,000. It was called by the public sector union ADEDY. Those involved included court staff, schoolteachers and doctors at state hospitals in Athens and Piraeus. During the action emergency staff manned hospitals.

A rally was held in central Athens at midday. One of the protesters told *euronews*, "How can we survive, when half our families are jobless. How can we survive on 400 euros a month?" Another worker interviewed said, "We'll continue our struggle for as long as it takes. All these measures are unconstitutional". A female worker on the demonstration said, "I have two unemployed children and I'm all by myself. I want my job back".

Municipal workers joined the strike. ADEDY has called a further two-day strike beginning March 19.

### Protests against redundancies outside Athens parliament

Greek school guards protested at a rally outside the parliament building Athens Thursday against plans by the government to lay them off. The guards gathered on Vassilissis Sofias Avenue and disrupted traffic.

The school guards have been placed in a "mobility scheme", on reduced pay, that ends on March 22. The scheme was devised as a means to eventually sack thousands of workers, as part of the austerity measures demanded by the European Union led "troika". *Kathemerini* reported that "many if not all may face dismissal unless they are transferred to a different part of the state sector."

The newspaper also reported that "Cleaning staff at the Finance Ministry who are in the same position also staged a rally on Thursday in front of the state's General Accounting Office, where they briefly scuffled with police who used tear gas to disperse them."

### Greek pharmacists hold further action

Pharmacists in Greece, members of the PanHellenic Pharmacists' Union, struck Monday and Tuesday of this week.

They were protesting government plans to allow the sale of over-the-

counter medicines by supermarkets and plans to reduce the profit margin of pharmacists to 15 percent, which they say will force many of them to close.

### Ambulance staff strike in Yorkshire, England

Ambulance staff employed by the Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust (YAS) in the north of England held a five-hour strike on Monday. This was their fifth strike since February 1. The action was in opposition to their employers' proposal to change shift patterns, lengthening them to up to 10 hours without a meal break. The workers are members of the Unite, who said this could harm patient safety.

Unite represents only a minority of ambulance staff employed by YAS and is not recognised by the employer. The Unison union represents around three quarters of the 4,000 strong workforce. Unison had threatened to strike over the same issue but withdrew the threat at the last minute. Unison claimed victory after the employer promised improved break times..

### London school truancy staff walk-out

Truancy officers employed by Lewisham Council in London held a one-day strike Wednesday. They were protesting the council's plans to reduce the workforce by nearly half in an effort to cut £300,000 from the service's budget. The budget was previously cut by £200,000. The council is proposing schools buy in truancy services from their existing budgets.

The staff are members of the Unite union. The union said they were striking; "in defence of a service that helps 4,000 children annually...If the cuts go ahead, the result will be a disaster for truancy levels across the borough..."

### Georgian manganese operatives take action

All 3,500 operatives in the Chiatura region in Western Georgia, employed by Georgian Manganese in its seven mining and five refinery sites, have gone on strike. Amongst their demands are for payment of arrears of wages and health and safety issues.

A separate strike by around 400 workers, employed by Rusmetal, which specialises in Ferro-alloys, has broken out over arrears of wages now

mounting to three months and enforced unpaid leave.

### **Georgian firefighters demand re-instatement**

Around 25 firefighters in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, have set up protest tents in front of the city hall demanding re-instatement. They had previously held a hunger strike but had to give it up because of ill-health effects. In addition to the re-instatement of workers they are demanding the resignation of the service director.

### **Irish teachers' protest at hundreds of schools**

Around 27,000 teachers at 750 schools across Ireland held protest marches at lunchtime on Monday, protesting the new Junior Cycle Student Award programme.

The new programme affects secondary school education and will; "feature newly developed subjects and short courses, a focus on literacy, numeracy and key skills, and new approaches of assessment and reporting."

Teachers are concerned the changes are being brought in with inadequate discussion and will have a detrimental impact on the education of children.

The demonstrations were organised by the Teachers Union of Ireland and the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland. Both unions are holding a ballot from their members on non-cooperation with the proposed changes, with action up to and including a strike. The results will be announced March 26.

Teachers Union of Ireland President Gerard Craughwell said the protests were called by the unions "to get a national conversation going on where we're going with this junior cycle". He said of industrial action, "We don't want to see it go there but the [Education] minister continues to ignore what we are trying to tell him."

### **Irish High Court blocks planned aviation strike**

The planned strike by Irish aviation workers over the 750 million euro deficit in the pension fund of aviation workers has been blocked by the High Court. Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) members employed at Dublin and Cork airports were due to go on strike on Friday, but the High Court in Dublin gave Dublin Airport Authority an injunction on Wednesday preventing SIPTU holding the planned four-hour strike.

### **Maltese nurses industrial action**

Nurses working in the Dermatology department at the Sir Paul Boffa hospital in Valetta, Malta were set to begin industrial action on Thursday. They will report to their manager for ward placement but will not provide outpatient services.

The nurses are members of the Maltese Union of Midwives and Nurses

(MUMN) and are protesting staffing changes that have occurred without any consultation.

### **Middle East**

#### **Egyptian public transport strike**

Several hundred public transport workers in Alexandria began an all-out strike March 8 demanding they be covered by the national minimum wage agreement. The workers include bus and tram drivers and support workers.

#### **Israeli foreign ministry staff continue protest**

Employees of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs are continuing their strike protesting low wages and poor working conditions. The action May has led to the cancellation of a visit by Pope Francis who was due to come at the end of May.

#### **Strike by Oman oil workers continues**

The two-week old strike by workers at Octal Petrochemicals Company in Oman continues. They are seeking better wages and the re-instatement of their union representative.

### **Africa**

#### **Swaziland poultry operators locked-out**

Workers who took protest action at Swaziland Poultry Processors and were sacked by the company, but were subsequently reinstated under a high court order issued March 4 have been locked out. The Swaziland manufacturing and Allied Workers Union (SMAWU), instructed workers to turn up for work on March 10, but when they did so, they found the company gates locked and manned by security guards.

The employers have demanded a review of the court order. Currently there is no dialogue between the company and the union, with the latter taking further legal action.

#### **South African tea processors strike**

The strike by tea processing workers employed by the Rooibos tea company in the Cederger municipality has ended after management imposed a 7.5 percent pay increase. The staff had been jointly represented in negotiations by the regional African National Congress, ANC and the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU). FAWU had initially demanded a 10 percent wage increase.

The strike began five weeks ago with 180 employees taking part but by the end this had reduced to 60. Management's demand was set out by the

ANC negotiator Gerald Muller who said the company had refused workers returning from the strike entry onto the premises before they first signed a document stating they would not strike again over the same issue.

### **Nigerian judges support judiciary staff suspend strike**

The Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria, JUSUN, suspended a three-day warning strike set for Wednesday. The strike was slated as a protest against the state and federal governments' refusal to respect the autonomy of the judiciary.

JUSUN had initially set the strike to protest the failure of state institutions to implement a judgement of the Federal High Court in January

### **Chadian oil workers three day strike**

Workers at the Great Wall Drilling Company in Chad, producing 120,000 barrels per day, and at the oil servicing company, China National Logging Corporation began a three-day strike midnight Sunday.

The oil workers struck after a promised wage increase in January never materialised. It was only when the oil workers threatened to strike again that the two companies offered a miserly two percent pay offer, to start in 2015. The 1,600 workers, employed in the Chadian oil exploration sector operate in the Bongor Basin and Logone region near the Cameroon border in the South.

### **Kenyan university staff strike in defiance of court order**

The Federation of Kenya Employers defied a court order this week barring a strike by university staff due to begin on Wednesday. Two unions, the Kenya Universities Staff Union and the Universities Academic Staff Union called the strike to protest the alleged misappropriation of funds by university vice chancellors and college principals.



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