

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

11 April 2014

24-hour general strike in Greece

The main public and private sector union in Greece held a 24-hour general strike on Wednesday—the first this year. The strike was in opposition to additional labour reforms being demanded by European Union-International Monetary Fund creditors. They are demanding further lay-offs in the civil service—on top of mass layoffs already implemented in the public sector—and reform of existing labour laws to limit the right to strike.

The action came under conditions in which EU-IMF demands have already produced a social catastrophe in Greece, with youth unemployment at 57 percent and widespread poverty.

The strike affected most public transport. Schools, law courts and other government offices were closed and health workers struck except for emergencies. (See: “On eve of Merkel visit, massive anti-austerity strike in Greece”)

UK union warns of health strike over pay

The Unison union has warned of possible strikes over pay in the National Health Service this year. This follows Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt’s decision to reject the pay review body’s recommendation for a one percent increase across all pay scales.

Senior Unison representatives have agreed to call a strike ballot, which will be discussed at a conference that meets in Brighton next week.

Iceland teachers return to work

Iceland secondary teachers returned to work on Monday following a three-week strike. Under a new collective wage agreement that extends until October 2016, teachers will receive an immediate 2.8 percent pay increase with a further two percent in August and a further two percent in January 2016. With the current inflation rate just over two percent the deal does not represent an increase in real terms.

Bulgarian railway infrastructure staff protest

Employees of Bulgarian Railway Infrastructure Company held protests on Tuesday to demand higher salaries and to express support for colleagues currently in discussion regarding a new collective agreement.

Irish teachers boycott school curriculum reform

Secondary teachers belonging to the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI) and the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) began non-cooperation action on Monday, over the government’s preparations to introduce Junior Cert reforms. The proposed changes, to be phased in over eight years, would include a new English curriculum, and teacher assessments to replace the traditional June exams.

The teachers’ action consists of a withdrawal from training and planning activities related to the reforms, and not to engage in the school-based assessment of students.

Egyptian photojournalists strike

Last Friday photojournalists in Egypt went on strike to protest the killing a week before of a photojournalist covering protests. They are members of the Journalists Syndicate and in a letter addressed to the syndicate head Diaa Rashwan they demanded that their employers provide them with better protective gear when covering protests.

Journalist Mayada Ashraf was killed in March when he covered a clash between police and supporters of ousted President Morsi. Ashraf was the eleventh journalist killed since January 2011.

In response, Egyptian authorities arrested Al Jazeera journalist Abdel-Rahman Shaheen for allegedly inciting violence. They claimed he had previously worked for the Muslim Brotherhood’s media, which has been banned in a clampdown by the military junta. Thousands of Muslim Brotherhood supporters are in jail and death sentences have been handed out against hundreds of them.

Several English-language Al Jazeera journalists are already in jail, including Australian correspondent Peter Greste and Mohammed Fahmy. They are charged with terror-related offences.

Iranian steel workers hold further protest after factory closure

Around 200 steel workers from the Zagros steel factory held a further demonstration in front of the ministry of labour in Qaravah on Sunday. They are demanding payment of arrears of wages owed them since the factory closed in July last year, when all the workers were laid off.

Israeli port workers strike

Port workers at the port of Ashdod went on strike on Sunday. Members of the Ashdod Port union argued that management had broken an agreement when they brought in a new policy, which banned union members' relatives from being hired at the port. The union chief and secretary were called for a disciplinary hearing. On Monday the Be'er Sheva' Labour Court issued a ruling ordering them back to work.

March against austerity in Morocco

Around 8,000 workers represented by the three main union bodies in Morocco held a march through Casablanca on Sunday to protest the government's austerity measures. Protestors carried placards reading: "We demand the protection of our standard of living" and "No to the raising of the age of retirement."

Police arrested several pro-democracy marchers who had taken part in the march when they denounced the Moroccan monarchy.

Doctors at Nigerian eye hospital resume action

Resident doctors at the Kaduna National Eye centre Nigeria resumed their strike action over unpaid allowances on April 1, in line with a ruling given by the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA).

The NMA ordered all local affiliates, which includes the Association of Resident Doctors, to make sure that payment of allowances are paid to doctors in their hospitals. Medical doctors in the Eye Centre have not received their allowances, while other health workers have.

Dockers at Port of Sudan threaten strike

Dockworkers at the main Sudanese port of Port Sudan on the Red Sea have threatened to strike if the labourers' wages are not raised and the ban on recruitment is not lifted. The Dock Workers Corporations' transport committee deputy chairman said there were not enough labourers, and the dockworkers are complaining about back pain, hernias and haemorrhoids.

Nigerian lecturers protest

Lecturers at the Yaba technology College, Nigeria, held a protest on April 8 to raise public awareness of their six-month old strike.

Members of the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) have been on strike since October last year demanding the government honour its 2010 agreement signed with the unions ASUP and Colleges of Education Academics Staff Union (COEASU).

Doctors in Nigerian state of Ekiti suspend walk out

The Medical Association in Ekiti State, Nigeria, suspended a three-day warning strike that began Monday April 7 after the state government secured a court injunction. The strike followed a one-week ultimatum given to the government by the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), which is demanding the immediate restoration of Consolidated Medical Salary Scales for primary health care doctors and hospital medical staff.

Consolidated Salary Structure (CONMESS) is the salary scale for Medical and Dental practitioners in Nigeria that was approved by the Federal Government on the 29th of September 2009.

South African firm Amplats orders miners back to work

Amplats has ordered National Union of Miners (NUM) and non-union miners to return to work at its platinum mining company in the South African platinum belt. Amplats is one of three platinum companies in dispute with the Association of Miners and Construction Union (AMCU), which continues into its 11th week. The NUM members and non-union mine workers have been stood down on pay as more than 70,000 AMCU members have halted production at Amplats, Impala and Lonmin since 3 January.

Amplats reported only one percent of miners reported for work and they remain closed.



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