

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

8 August 2014

Greek journalists in 24-hour strike

Journalists from several Greek trade unions began a 24-hour strike Tuesday to protest an amendment to a government bill currently being discussed in the Greek parliament. The amendment, which was tagged onto a completely unrelated bill, would allow media companies to group together, allowing them to bypass current legal restrictions on the number of employees they are able to dismiss and push through large-scale sackings.

It would also allow radio and TV companies to change the format of their programmes, say from a news channel to a film channel without having to hand back their licences to the state and rebid on the basis of their new format.

Greek hospital workers warn against closure of psychiatric hospitals

Public hospital workers from the POEDN union warned this week that they would take prolonged protest action if government plans to streamline the public health system affected mental health facilities. This follows a Health Ministry decision to close one of Greece's largest psychiatric clinics at Dafni, in western Attica and turn it into a general hospital.

POEDN explained that due to overcrowding in Greece's specialised psychiatric clinics, around 20 percent of mental patients are being treated on psychiatric wards at general hospitals. These wards lack the facilities needed to treat psychiatric patients. POEDN explained: "Psychiatric and general hospitals are at 140 percent capacity in terms of the beds reserved for patients with serious mental illnesses."

The severe economic crisis and the imposition of severe austerity measures have led to a spike in mental illness and the number of suicides in Greece.

Strike of Italian airport staff

Baggage handlers at Rome's Fiumicino airport came out on strike Tuesday over threatened job cuts. They work for Alitalia which is seeking a merger deal with Abu Dhabi airline carrier, Etihad. Under the deal, Etihad will invest around €550 million and receive a 49 percent stake in the company. However, as part of the deal, Etihad wants 2,171 jobs to be cut.

In previous negotiations, job losses of 1,635 were agreed to, with some workers being moved to other companies and some receiving redundancy

payments. It is reported that most of the unions involved have agreed with the job losses apart from CGIL, the biggest union, and the nominally left-wing USB union.

Staff at Ritzy cinema in London consider new pay offer

Workers at the Ritzy Picturehouse cinema in the Brixton area of London are currently considering an improved pay offer made by their employers. They have held 11 strikes over the last few months in pursuit of a pay rise, demanding to be paid the so-called London living wage (LLW) which is currently £8.80 an hour.

The new offer came after talks on July 30 under the auspices of the government body, the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), which included the employer and representatives and officials from the BECTU trade union.

Under the new two-year deal the pay of cinema staff will be increased to £8 an hour, backdated to October of last year. This will be followed by a subsequent rise to £8.20 an hour in September and £8.40 an hour in January of next year. Only in September of next year will they be paid the current LLW of £8.80. However by then it is likely that with inflation the LLW rate will be above £8.80.

Protest in Hungary over anti-union action by Korean tyre company

Around 400 trade union activists from 60 Hungarian trade unions held a protest outside the premises of the Korean tyre makers, Hankook Tyre Company on Monday. The action was called by the Chemical, Energy and General Workers' Union (VDSZ). This followed the recent dismissal by the company of a VDSZ local union president.

General Secretary of the Industrial All Global Union, Jyrki Raina called on Hankook to reinstate the local union president and engage in talks with VDSZA over labour relations.

Turkish workers protest union-busting by pharmaceutical company

Turkish workers recently held a protest against the pharmaceutical company, Deva Holding, which is a subsidiary of UK-based East Pharma.

Deva Holding has fired eight workers since June, after they joined the Petrol-Is union, an affiliate of the Industrial All Global Union. The sacked staff held their protest outside the entrance to Deva Holding.

They are also demanding the reimbursement of excess taxes and housing fund payments going back to 2011. The state governor insisted there would be no going back on the wage cut.

Palestinian protest over journalist killed in Gaza conflict

The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate (PJS) which is affiliated to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) held a rally on Tuesday outside the United Nations Office in Ramallah. They were protesting the killing to date of 13 journalists in Gaza who were reporting on the Israeli onslaught. They also demanded the Israeli forces be held to account for the deaths and for attacks on the media.

Hundreds of journalists, media workers and members of the public joined the protest. The protestors carried 13 coffins each with the names of one of the journalists killed to date in the conflict.

The latest to be killed was on Monday, when Hamada Khaled Maqqat aged 24, the editing director of the online news site SAJA died when the Israelis bombarded his house in Gaza.

Long-running dispute at Egyptian food manufacturer settled

A long running dispute over the suspension of five executive members of an independent union at the Alexandria factory of Mondelez International has been settled with their reinstatement.

Mondelez International is a US-based multinational food company with over 100,000 employees worldwide and branches in scores of countries. The giant company is the result of many mergers and buyouts of other food manufacturers including famous names such as Cadbury Chocolate.

The reinstatement follows a discussion between Mondelez International and the International Union of Foodworkers.

Protest by Kenyan flower workers

Workers at the Karuturi Flower Farm, Naivasha, Kenya, which is under receivership, went on a go-slow to protest the sacking of seven union officials last week. The seven union officials are accused of inciting their fellow workers.

A Kenyan Plantation Workers Union spokesman said the sackings followed a meeting which had been called on the issue of proposed wage increases.

Nigerian state government workers in Benue strike

Workers took strike action across the state capital of Benue, Makurdi, Nigeria on Friday last week, demanding the state government reverse a wage cut. The wage cut was ostensibly carried out to bring local government wages into line with that of teachers. The strike was called by the Nigerian Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress who said the state workers would not return to work until the cut is reversed.

The strike completely closed down local government offices, schools and other state-run facilities. The marketplace, managed by local government workers, was kept locked, affecting local traders. Banks were also forced to close for part of the day.

Sudanese teachers walk out over non-payment of benefits

Basic secondary school teachers in Nyala state, South Darfur, Sudan began indefinite strike action on August 3 over non-payment of their financial benefits and promotion increases since 2007. The money outstanding has now accumulated to SDG75,000 (\$13,100) for each of the teachers according to the State Employees Union.

Strike of Namibian diamond miners goes ahead

A proposed strike by Namibian diamond miners began on August 2 as negotiations broke down. The talks failed even though the deputy labour minister became involved.

The Namibian Union of Miners (NUM) rejected Namdeb, the diamond company's final offer. The NUM is demanding a 15 percent increase in basic wages across-the-board. They also want an 85 percent subsidy for their members' children's schooling fees, medical coverage increased from 20 percent up to 100 percent and a 14 percent housing allowance.

The rejected revised offer was for a 10 percent across-the-board wage increase and a 10 percent increase in medical contributions for a year. Namdeb claims that education is not an employment condition and there is no change on their 8.5 percent housing allowance offer.

Nigerian academics warning strike

The Nigerian Benin College of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) began a three-day warning strike this week after management renege on agreements.

The COEASU Ekiadolor Chapter is demanding immediate payment of a 2013 allowance for heads of departments, coordinators, deans and directors at a variety of schools.

The academic congress resolved, on July 30, to shut down academic activities if their demands were not met. They complained a lot of money is owed to their trust fund and the academic staff is only receiving half pay when full pay is available. In a joint statement, COEASU Chairman and secretary said that a series of meetings with management had failed.

The union said if nothing is resolved as a result of the warning strike, it will be extended.



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