

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

26 September 2014

## Europe

### Strike by Greek public sector workers

Greek public sector employees, including teachers, doctors and municipal workers, held a 24-hour strike on Tuesday. The strike was called by the public sector union ADEDY. They were protesting further planned job cuts dictated by the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as part of the bailout of the Greek economy.

They carried placards reading, “No to firings” and “EU, IMF out!” They held their strike as the Greek prime minister, Antonis Samaras, was visiting Germany for talks with Chancellor, Angela Merkel.

Since the global financial crisis in 2008, the Greek economy has contracted by one quarter.

### One-day strike by municipal workers in Finnish capital

Around 9,000 Helsinki municipal staff, represented by JHL, the public and welfare services union, held a one-day strike on Tuesday. It affected bus and tram public transport services, sports centres, day care provision and school meals.

The strike was to protest Helsinki council’s proposals to privatise the services currently undertaken by the council owned service provider, Palmia. The council is due to vote on the proposals on October 8.

According to JHL, the transfer of services to private hands would lead to a 16 percent pay cut for 1,400 council staff.

### Strike of rail workers in French capital

Rail workers employed by Transilien, which provides commuter train services in Paris, held a one-day strike on Wednesday. It was called in support of two Transilien staff facing disciplinary action the same day.

The two employees, who work in a switching centre, were alleged to have consumed rum whilst at work in the switching room. The unions involved in the strike are SUD-Rail, CGT and UNSA. The unions say the rum was used in the making of crepes and that none of those involved downed a glass of rum. Six other staff have already been disciplined over the alleged incident.

### Bulgarian miners at second pit vow to support colleagues

A Bulgarian radio report on September 19 announced workers at the Bobov Dol coal mine would launch a sympathy strike in support of their colleagues at the Cherno More mine situated in the coastal city of Burgas.

The Cherno More miners had stayed underground at the end of their overnight shift on September 18 to protest non-payment of wages since July. They were then joined in the underground sit-in by miners beginning their day shift.

### Further strike by German Amazon employees

Around 2,000 Amazon staff employed at Amazon sites at Bad Hersfeld, Leipzig, Graben and Rheinberg held a one-day strike Monday. The company in Germany employs around 9,000 permanent staff and thousands of temporary staff.

They are members of the Verdi union, which began a campaign in April 2013 for Amazon staff to be paid in line with other retail staff. Amazon classifies its staff as logistic workers who are paid at a lower rate than retail staff.

### Irish doctors protest over cutbacks

Around 300 doctors providing general practice (GP) services held a protest outside the Irish Dail (parliament) in Dublin on Wednesday. They are members of the National Association of General Practitioners (NAGP).

They were protesting cutbacks in the service imposed by the Irish government.

### Italian union agrees to Fiat temporary layoff plan

The Fim-Cisl union has agreed to the temporary laying off of workers at the Pomigliano Fiat plant when the company suspends production during the week of October 16-27.

Speaking on Friday of last week after a meeting between the Fim-Cisl union and Fiat management, the union secretary general, Giuseppe Terracciano, told the press the shutdown was necessary due to “the slowdown in the market in view of the end of the year.”

### **Mass strike against changes to Norwegian labour laws**

Several thousand Norwegian workers affiliated to the LO union went on strike Tuesday against the Norwegian government's plans to change the labour laws, making it easier for employers to employ more temporary staff rather than offering permanent positions in an attempt to casualise the labour market. Protests were held in Oslo and Trondheim. Those on strike in Trondheim included bus drivers.

### **Protest by Belgian workers against austerity plans**

Around 5,000 workers aligned to several trade union organisations held a protest in the Belgian capital of Brussels on Monday.

They were protesting plans by the federal coalition government to bring in swingeing austerity cuts which the unions say will lead to 50,000 job losses and pay losses in real terms.

### **300,000 UK health workers to strike in October**

This week Unison, a public sector trade union whose membership includes thousands of health workers, announced it would hold a four-hour strike on October 13. This will be followed by four days of action short of a strike.

The result of a ballot on strike action was announced by the union last week. Around two-thirds of those completing the ballot paper voted for the action, however only around 10 percent of its 300,000 members took part in the ballot.

An independent pay review board recommended a 1 percent pay increase for all staff, but this was refused by the government who ruled it would not give the increase to any staff due a pay increase as part of an automatic pay progression mechanism.

#### **Middle East**

### **Ongoing Israeli postal workers dispute**

The dispute between the state owned Israeli Post Service and its staff continues. The Post Service wants to lay off 1,500 postal workers as part of its efficiency plans. The Histadrut Labour Federation held a three-hour solidarity strike on Monday leading to the closure of Ben Gurion airport.

Histadrut is currently engaged in negotiations with the company, but has warned of a general strike if no progress is made.

### **Lebanese contract power workers struggle continues**

Contract workers employed by the state-owned Electricite du Liban (EDL) are continuing their campaign to be made permanent workers

either immediately or when their current contract ends in 2016. Many of them have been employed as contract workers for many years, missing out on social security, holiday and other employment benefits to which permanent staff are entitled.

Frustrated with lack of progress in their 40-plus day protest, two of them threatened to commit suicide outside a facility of the National Electrical Utility on Monday. One of them began cutting himself until covered in blood, whilst another poured fuel over his body and threatened to set himself alight until restrained by his colleagues.

### **Gaza hospital hygiene workers set three-day strike**

Hygiene workers employed by companies providing services in hospitals throughout Gaza were due to begin a three-day strike Wednesday to protest the Ministry of Health failing to provide budgets for the services. Currently their salaries are five months in arrears.

#### **Africa**

### **Lockout of South African engineering workers continues**

The Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) is claiming that the engineering employers association, the National Employers Association of South Africa, (NEASA) is in the process of union bashing, with the support of government officials.

Workers at many of the companies coming under the auspice of NEASA have been locked out for months, over a wage settlement the companies did not agree with.

Some of the companies have been attempting to get workers back to work by sending out company headed letters and calls to workers saying they could return to work if they resigned from the unions. COSATU said this activity was against the labour law, but the government is remaining silent on it.

### **Strike of Sudan medics**

Doctors in West Darfur, Sudan, went out on strike Tuesday demanding an increase in allowances and against the deterioration of hospital services. The strike was in response to being ignored by the Ministry of Health, which then reacted to the strike by inviting the doctors to a meeting.

In a separate dispute, 3,000 school teachers remain on strike in East Darfur, going into their second month without any sign of resolution.

### **Demonstration by Somali port workers**

Somali port workers demonstrated outside parliament in Mogadishu on Tuesday protesting against the new Turkish agency that has taken over the management of the government controlled seaport. The new agency had announced it would be reducing the pay of labourers at the dock. The workers also fear job cuts.

A spokesman for the Somali Congress of Trade Unions, the dock workers union, complained they had not been consulted.

### **Namibian construction workers strike**

Around 80 Namibian workers came out on strike on Monday against the China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC), protesting poor working conditions. China Engineering Company is in the first year of building Namport's (state port authority) N\$4 billion (\$360 million) container terminal with a Namibian and Chinese workforce of 300.

The workers' grievances are that they are not given permanent employment status and they are required to sign new contracts each month. The workers complain that they pay tax and other dues but they do not have a tax code and there is no provision of social security, meal or travel allowance.

A Namport spokesperson commented that the strike was illegal and it was up to CHEC to deal with it.

### **Strike of Nigerian college staff**

Staff at 104 Federal Unity Colleges across Nigeria began a strike on September 22 demanding months of unpaid wages and promotion and other entitlements arrears spanning years.

The strike by the Association of Senior Civil Servants (ASCS) follows a national strike of education officers in the Federal Ministry of Education and inspectorate departments that have been left paralyzed.

Several agreements between the Education Ministry and the union to pay outstanding wages and entitlements have been broken by the government. A meeting was scheduled for September 17, but no one of authority representing the government turned up, instigating the current strike action. The ASCS says it will not return to work until all arrears are paid.

### **Strike of South African dairy operatives**

South African bottling and dairy product workers have gone on strike at Crickley Dairy Products in Queenstown in opposition to an imposed 5.5 percent wage rise. The workers are striking against poor wages, with the lowest paid receiving R1500 (\$134) and the highest R4000 (\$358). The dairy workers are demanding a further 3 percent increase on top of the 5.5 percent mandated rise and a 10 percent night shift allowance.



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