

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

14 August 2015

## Europe

### Workers in Greek PAME federation demonstrate against Syriza austerity agreement

On August 5, workers affiliated to the Greek Communist Party's PAME trade union federation demonstrated outside the Labor Ministry against the pension cuts agreed by the Syriza government in July. They were protesting against the 4-6 percent increase in pensioners' health contributions as well as the attacks on pensioners' rights.

This week the Syriza government agreed to all the main demands of the European Union-led "troika" in return for a loan of up to €86 billion. Among the measures agreed is the phasing out of early retirement and a sell-off of state assets worth up to €50 billion.

### National gallery staff in London begin indefinite strike

Around 200 staff at London's prestigious National Gallery began indefinite strike action on Tuesday. Members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union have been taking strike action since February.

They are protesting National Gallery's plans to privatise 400 visitor services roles, with the jobs to be managed by a private security firm. Workers fear that if their jobs are taken over by the private security firm, it will lead to pay cuts, worse conditions and zero hour contracts.

Since the beginning of the dispute, the staff involved has struck for a total of 56 days, including a block of ten days in May.

The strike has led to most of the gallery site being closed to visitors. The Sainsbury wing at the gallery in Trafalgar Square, which is staffed by a private security firm, has remained open.

Candy Udwin, a PCS rep at the gallery, was sacked for allegedly disclosing information that the plan was to appoint a private security firm to run the service. The gallery was forced to reinstate her while she appeals the decision.

The National Gallery have announced the appointment of Securitas as a partner to run its visitor and security services.

### Further strikes announced by London underground rail staff

Rail workers on the London Underground (LU) rail system (the Tube) have announced two further 24-hour strikes, beginning the evenings of August 25 and August 27.

The workers are opposing changes to terms and conditions demanded by LU management, including job losses, the introduction of a 24-hour train service on some lines and a derisory one percent pay increase.

Previous 24-hour strikes occurred on July 8 and August 6. Four unions—the RMT, Unite, TSSA and ASLEF, the train drivers union—were involved in the previous stoppages. RMT, Unite and the office staff union TSSA have declared they will strike on August 25 and 27. However, ASLEF said talks with LU management are ongoing and are making progress but could still collapse.

The August 6 strike received solid support, with 20,000 LU workers taking part and London brought to a virtual standstill.

### Strikes by Welsh museum staff to continue

Museum staff at various National Museum Wales sites are to continue their intermittent strike action. They held a two-day strike over the weekend of August 1 and 2.

The staff, members of the Public and Commercial Services Union, voted by an over 80 percent majority for strikes against the Museum's plans to end premium pay for weekend work.

Among the dates slated for walkouts are: August 12 for the Slate Museum in Llanberis, August 15 and 16 for the Big Pit Mining Village, and August 20 for the Drefach, Swansea and St Fagans sites. Other sites will take strike action on other dates and workers at all National Museum Wales sites will strike on August 29.

### Workers at British dockyard hold one-day strike over pay

Employees at Babcock Devonport Dockyard in southern England held a one-day strike Friday August 7 in pursuit of a pay increase. They are members of the GMB trade union.

### Strike threat by Hungarian social work staff

Tens of thousands of social work staff in Hungary are set to strike in the autumn if their demands for a significant pay rise are not met. The workers held demonstrations in May and July to protest being underpaid and overworked.

Laszlo Kiss, the head of the Independent Health Care union, rejected the HUF 209 (\$0.75) an hour wage supplement that has been offered to social work staff to be paid up to November. He said it did not comply with their demands and did not apply to 30,000 social work staff with less than 11 years' service.

The Hungarian courts have given the go ahead for any proposed strike by social work staff in the autumn.

### Maltese health inspectors boycott beach inspections

Health inspectors in Malta have been instructed by the Malta Workers' Union (UHM) not to carry out work monitoring drainage leaks and contamination incidents at Maltese beaches.

The action follows the imposition of new working measures on health inspectors without prior consultation. The UHM claims the changes, which relate to taking samples from pollution incidents, are against Department of Health safeguards, and jeopardise the inspectors' health.

### Spanish trade union body calls for rail strikes

Spain's largest union body, the CCOO, has called rail strikes in September, in opposition to plans for the privatisation of rail services in Spain.

Rail workers fear the plan will lead to job losses. On August 4, talks between the union and the National Network of Spanish Railways (Renfe) broke down. The CCOO said Renfe plans to sell off half its assets and privatize the train maintenance service, putting 5,000 jobs at risk.

### Protest by Turkish teachers

Unemployed teachers, who had previously been employed in privately run Dershane or preparatory schools, held a demonstration in the Turkish capital, Ankara, on Monday.

Following a government ruling, the preparatory schools were ordered to

close down. The government had promised that any teacher who had worked in such schools for six years or more would be offered jobs in government controlled public sector schools, but this did not happen. Those protesting held placards stating, "Prep school teachers are being mistreated."

The Constitutional Court recently overturned the ruling against the forced closure of the preparatory schools, but many former preparatory teachers are still without jobs.

## **Middle East**

### **Egyptian public sector workers protest**

Hundreds of Egyptian public sector workers held a protest march in Cairo on Monday. They were protesting the civil service law enacted in March, which limits bonuses paid out to workers and has led to their monthly incomes diminishing.

Managers have also been given more powers to determine their employees' pay rates and promotion prospects, leading to accusations of discrimination against employees who do not curry favour.

Employees of the Public Transport Authority based in the Badr, Nasr and Gesr al-Suez bus stations in Cairo took part in partial strikes and slow-downs at the same time.

One of the transport workers, speaking to the media, said he would be back next on August 17 to protest again if their demands were ignored. He said a strike on August 30 was also being planned.

### **Egyptian ceramic workers protest closure of factory**

Dozens of workers from the Rock Ceramic factory in Ain Sokhna held a demonstration outside the offices of the Manpower Ministry in Suez on Tuesday.

They were protesting the enforced closure of the factory due to Rock Ceramic's inability to pay money owed to the company supplying it with natural gas.

The natural gas supplier said if the money were not paid by July 27, they would cut off the gas supply the next day. When Rock Ceramic failed to make the payment, the gas supply was cut on July 28. The factory then shut down, with the workers forced to take unpaid leave.

### **Series of factory fires lead to deaths in Cairo**

Three workers died in a fire in a paint factory on Sunday, whilst several were injured. On Saturday, five workers died and seven were injured in a fire in a glucose and starch factory. These deaths come just days after a fire at furniture factory claimed the lives of 26 workers and injured more than 20.

## **Africa**

### **Strike by South African hospital staff in Cape Town**

Staff at the laboratory of the Somerset Hospital, Cape Town, struck Tuesday, demanding the implementation of a wage deal agreed in April.

Around 30 members of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union protested outside the hospital and demanded their employer, the National Health Laboratory Service, pay up.

### **Kenyan medics to join nurses on strike**

Members of the Kenyan Medical Practitioners and Dentist Union (KMPDU) are planning to join nurses by going on strike at the end of August. The union said its 3,000 members would join other medical supporting staff in a national stoppage, if promotion promises were not

honoured.

Following the devolution of health services to county authorities in 2013, the 44 county governors had promised 1,800 doctors promotion. This has not materialised.

In response to the reneged commitments, 2,400 healthcare workers and 150 doctors are already striking to demand the agreement be implemented. The action has paralysed operations in 117 dispensaries, 24 medical centres and seven hospitals.

### **Kenyan airport union cancels strike**

The union representing Kenyan airport workers has called off a strike originally set for later this week to demand the implementation of pay increases negotiated in an agreement with Kenya Civil Aviation Authority (KCAA). Moss Ndiema, secretary general of the workers union, said a new agreement had been signed.

A sizable proportion of the 400 staff work as air traffic controllers and a strike would have paralyzed the industry.

A seven-day strike notice was posted August 5. The agreed settlement was for a 10 percent pay rise and housing and transport allowances to rise by Sh2,000 (US\$20) and Sh600 (US\$6) respectively. Workers complain that inflation over the last six months is running at 16 percent. The deal was concluded two years ago but management had refused to sign it.

### **Ghanaian medics continue industrial action**

Two thousand Ghanaian doctors employed in public hospitals, who are members of the Ghanaian Medical Association, escalated their industrial dispute by withdrawing cover for emergency services from August 7.

They are demanding improved allowances and other non-salary benefits. They have threatened an all-out strike from August 14 if the government does not respond.

Other professional workers are lining up behind the doctors in preparing for industrial action, including psychiatric nurses and university lecturers.

The Ghana economy is under an International Monetary Fund stabilization programme, which has reduced the wage bill as a proportion of tax revenues from 70 to 55 percent over the last three years.

### **Liberian Ebola staff strike**

Liberian health care workers at the Ebola Treatment Units (ETU) around Monrovia went on strike and demonstrated over unpaid hazard payments.

The demonstration took place outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where police were present. The ETU staff is owed \$5,000 and were offered half this amount, as an initial payment, but the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare have still not paid them.

One example of the hazards workers face was that of health worker who reportedly said her doctor had told her that chlorine used in the process of sanitation had damaged her heart.

### **Namibian miners impose short-time working in protest at long shifts**

Up to 200 miners at the Skorpion Zinc mine in Namibia have refused to work 12-hour shifts and unilaterally reduced their working time to nine hours a day.

The company has been imposing the 12-hour shifts despite labour law limiting the five-day shifts to 45 hours. Workers are also claiming N\$49m (\$3.8m) through the courts for unpaid overtime for hours in excess of the legal limit of 45 that the company has not paid in the past.

The company is threatening to reduce monthly wages and other related benefits by 25 percent, representing the three hours of unworked time, although each contract is for a statutory 45 hours. Workers claim the company's action is illegal.

### **Wage deal imposed on Namibian shop workers**

Retail staff working for Shoprite in Namibia are striking after the company imposed a wage deal. The Labour Ministry deemed the action illegal.

In June, the shop workers put in a claim for higher salaries, transport allowances, housing allowances, a thirteenth cheque, medical aid cover

and twice yearly provision of uniforms. Other outstanding grievances concern the fact that many of the shop workers, who have worked for the company for many years, are still employed on a casual basis and are paid the same rate as new recruits.

The Namibia Commercial Catering Food and Allied Workers Union, represents the workers but is not recognised by the company. The union said it was concerned the company has imposed a wage deal without negotiations.



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