

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

18 December 2015

Greek unions call rally against Tuesday night bill vote

Members of the GSEE (private sector) and ADEDY (public sector) trade union federations demonstrated outside the Greek parliament Tuesday evening, as the Syriza-Independent Greeks government passed further “prior action” austerity measures demanded by their creditors.

The protest began at Klafthmonos Square and headed to the main Syntagma Square outside parliament. Members of the Stalinist Communist Party-affiliated union federation PAME protested in a separate march and rally.

Among the measures agreed passed by the government are cuts in workers’ wages and the creation of a new privatisation fund. They were passed with all the coalition’s 153 deputies voting in favour, meaning the government will secure a further €1 billion in loans.

Doctors in Italy strike

Doctors in Italy held a 24-hour strike Wednesday in protest at health budget cuts. Around 200,000 took part, including hospital, family doctors, pediatricians and veterinary surgeons.

Doctors say they oppose the “indifference of the government to the problems of public health.” Along with other health staff, doctors are planning a two-day strike in January.

Belgian railway workers vote to strike

Workers at Belgian national railway operator SNCB are set for a five-day strike in January. They are opposed to threats by the company to increase productivity, reduce the working week without compensation in wages and other issues.

The strikes are set to go ahead on January 5-6 and January 21-23.

The trade union bureaucracy is working to prevent the strikes, particularly as SNCB management is threatening to stop a finance agreement it has with the unions if they proceed. Under the current agreement, the unions receive €10 million a year from SNCB, with the current agreement running out at the end of the year.

Staff at Northern Irish plane manufacturing plant reject cost-cutting measures

Staff working for the Canadian-based Bombardier plant in Belfast, Northern Ireland, have voted to reject management cost-cutting plans. Bombardier, which employs around 5,500 staff at its Belfast plant, wants to impose a pay freeze and increase the working week by one hour. The company is seeking a three-year deal with pay frozen in 2016 and 2017 but a 2 percent offer for 2018.

Following the vote, the Unite trade union announced it would seek further negotiations with Bombardier.

The Belfast plant manufactures and assembles the wings for the company’s CSeries aircraft.

UK rail staff on rail sleeper service vote to strike

Rail staff employed on the Caledonian Sleeper rail service, which runs between London and Aberdeen, have voted to strike. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members voted by a 90 percent margin to strike and take other forms of action.

The strikes are likely to be held in the week running up to Christmas.

Workers are protesting the poor state of the rolling stock used on the service. The RMT has noted more than 200 defects on the carriages operated by the Serco Company, which took over the service in March of this year. Among the defects were non-working smoke alarms, toilets out of commission, and broken lighting and heating systems.

Vote by Scottish college staff to strike

College lecturers in Scotland voted by a majority of more than 90 percent to strike in an indicative ballot. The ballot of members of the Educational Institute of Scotland-Further Education Lecturers’ Association (EIS-FELA) will be followed by a ballot of its members in the New Year.

The lecturers accuse the Scottish government of failing to finance colleges adequately. They are also angered by management awarding themselves pay rises of around 5 percent, while offering lecturers only 1 percent.

Strike call by Israeli trade union federation

The Israeli Histadrut trade union federation called a strike of public sector workers, to be held December 23, after meeting on Wednesday.

The strike was called over low public sector wages. There has been no pay increase for public sector workers for the last three years.

The dispute involves hundreds of thousands of government employees, including government administrative staff, education, hospital and social services staff.

A recent National Insurance Institute report found that 1.7 million Israelis lived in poverty.

Lebanese lawyers suspend strike

A strike of lawyers of the Tripoli Bar Association, which began last Thursday, was suspended Sunday after it was agreed to arrange a meeting on Monday to discuss their concerns.

The strike was over lawyers' concerns over a decision to appoint a legal guardian to oversee exam results for entry into the body. The bar council issued a statement against the "rushed judicial decision on behalf of Tripoli's judge of urgent matters that violates legal standards."

Nationwide strike by Moroccan public service and local government workers

On December 11, public sector and local government staff organised by the UMT, CDT and UGTM trade union federations held a nationwide one-day strike.

They are demanding the Moroccan government resume discussion with the unions over working conditions, living standards and pension provision. Such negotiations have not taken place since 2013. The unions said the strike met with full support from workers.

Strike by Zimbabwean sugar workers continues

Workers at Tongaat Hulett sugar plantation and refinery in Zimbabwe have been on strike since November 27. Sixteen thousand workers are demanding pay parity across the company's operations in the area. They are demanding a \$130 a month pay rise, as they are currently paid just \$170.

The company has ignored several court rulings in favour of the strikers. The president of Zimbabwe's Sugar Milling Industry Workers Union said, "The employer is demanding an end to the strike before they start negotiating, which is tantamount to disregarding the Supreme Court ruling."

Tongaat Hulett operates in South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. It produces 640,000 tons of sugar annually in Zimbabwe.

Strike by Kenyan hospital staff

Kenyan hospital workers at Migori County's largest hospital went on strike Monday. Medics and support workers are taking action over wages, lack of promotion and the nonpayment of union dues and loan repayments.

Staff organised in the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union are likely to join the action in support of demand to redress the lack of promotion, which they regard as long overdue. Medics and support workers in other hospitals across the county have mounted a supportive go-slow, raising similar demands.

Strike threat by Ghanaian rail staff/subhead]

Workers at the Ghana Railway Company are threatening to down tools if the company does not clear a backlog of outstanding wage payments. Workers running services from Accra to Tema and Accra to Nsaram are owed two months' wages.

Unions have threatened to strike today if the company does not honour its pay obligations in full.

The government had been subsidising the company by paying the workers' wages. The two passenger transport lines are insolvent, and the more lucrative western line that carries mineral resources such as manganese, timber and bauxite has been farmed out to government appointees.

The National Executive Council of the Railway Workers Union called for the dissolution of Ghana Railway Company board, accusing it of "failure on the part of the board to execute its functions."

Strike threat by Nigerian judiciary staff

The Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria in Keba State is threatening to strike unless the state government adheres to its commitments.

The union is demanding the state carry through its pledge on the adjustment of the judiciary salary scale. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in February, based on the judiciary being financed independently of the state governance.

Striking South African refuse workers seek support

Striking South African refuse workers in Msunduzi municipality are calling on residents of Pietermaritzburg to support their struggle.

According to *news24.com*, the strikers, who are occupying the Doull Road municipal depot, said they "do not like seeing 'garbage' in the city centre or the leaking pipes that have gone unrepaired for days, but stressed that they had to embark on the strike as their last resort."

A worker who wished to remain anonymous, fearing victimisation, said, "We exhausted every available means to sort this out, but the municipality was not coming to the party. We asked the municipality to meet with us, but they refused."

They pointed out the company was able to go to the law and get an interdict against their strike, but that the court did not act against the company when it continued to employ labour on a casual basis past the legal three-month limit.

Another striker protested that casual workers only receive a quarter of what full-time employees get. Approximately half—2,200 people—are contract workers in the Msunduzi municipality and some have been in that position for 15 years. Some full-time workers are supporting the strike.



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