

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

ETUC and ITUC: IMF attacks on Greek workers' rights are unacceptable

Brussels, 30 March 2017 (ITUC OnLine): The International and European Trade Union Confederations called on the International Monetary Fund to stop insisting that Greece undertake even more pension cuts and labour market deregulation before the Fund will agree to a new loan programme, or to signing off on disbursements by European institutions.

An IMF spokesperson stated last Thursday that the IMF is seeking “in particular, pension and labour reforms” as conditions for extending financial assistance to Greece. Greek workers have already suffered a severe reduction in their living standards. The austerity and deregulation measures demanded by the creditor institutions since 2010 have included reductions in minimum wages, pensions and the scope of collective bargaining.

ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow said “Greek workers have borne almost all the costs of the crisis that began in 2008: wages have fallen, pensions have been slashed and a quarter of the workforce remains unemployed. The ILO issued a major study last year showing that collective bargaining coverage in Greece fell from 70 per cent before the crisis to 10 per cent in 2015. Continuing to diminish workers’ collective rights will do nothing to put Greece on the path to economic recovery, but it will reinforce the alarming trend of growing inequality in the country.”

Luca Visentini, General Secretary of the ETUC, said that the latest attempt by the IMF to further diminish workers' rights in Greece constitutes an attack on the European social model: “Workers and employers, 95% of which are microenterprises, need collective bargaining at sectoral level and do not need

collective dismissals. The President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker has already sent a letter to Prime Minister Tsipras, clearly stating that collective bargaining and the right to strike are national matters, to be settled by social partners with government support, and that the Commission will not intervene on these matters in Greece. We want the IMF to show the same respect for Greek workers and companies, instead of imposing so-called ‘reforms’ which would further damage Greece’s economy and social cohesion.”

The OECD has published data showing that, after the deregulation that took place under a previous government, employment protection rules in Greece are already weaker than in the four Nordic countries, Germany, the Netherlands and several other EU countries.

The General Secretaries of the ITUC and ETUC expressed their solidarity with the Greek trade union confederation GSEE and urged the Greek government and its European counterparts to defend Greek workers' rights against the IMF's latest demands.

The ITUC represents 181 million workers in 163 countries and territories and has 340 national affiliates.

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