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Dear Colleagues,

The news that workers in the health care call centre (telemedicine service Saúde 24) go on strike for the second time in a month has spread across the union movement in Europe. We understand that the workers are not covered by a legal agreement and that you are protesting their false self-employed status and are fighting against the dismissal of 100 workers. The workers are demanding the resignation of the company's management.

The fight of the health staff (nurses mainly) against precarious work is one many unions in Europe are fighting, and EPSU, the European Federation of Public Services Trade Unions, supports that battle.

What management has done is not acceptable: firing those workers that refused to accept a deep pay cut (from 8,75 EUR per hour to 4 EUR per hour) and who demanded a legal contract after years of working as (false) self-employed for the company. It is not acceptable that management sacks those workers who stand up against the exploitation by the company, and who use their democratic rights to do so.

We know that the workers and the union are continuing the battle and have called in the Labour Inspectorate to monitor the situation and make a report. Even the Portuguese Parliament will continue discussing the case, as the behaviour of management is showing a 19th century mentality, hitting workers hard, most of them on low pay, and in a general economic situation that is already very difficult for so many workers and families.

As public service workers we know that providing good care to citizens requires decent pay and conditions as well as qualified staff. Lowering the pay and sacking workers will have a negative effect on those who use the service as they seek to avoid the overcrowded health emergency system. It is important to evaluate and re-assess why this system is operated by private sector companies that have profits, not the interests of users at heart. It is another example of a public-private partnership that is not a partnership but favours the interests of the consortium, the French call center giant Teleperformance and Portuguese Optimus (communication services). And governments are responsible as they award the contract to such exploitive companies.

We wish you much success in your struggle  
In solidarity,

Jan Willem Goudriaan  
EPSU Deputy General Secretary

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