

Europe, Russia and Africa

3 December 1998

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges workers and others to contribute to this feature by sending information to editor@wsws.org

Europe

- Greek workers to strike against government austerity measures
- French rail conductors strike for jobs
- Irish hospital workers strike against intimidation
- Irish train drivers shut down railways in unofficial action
- Scottish teachers union agrees to reinstate education curriculum
- Sky Chef sacks 200 employees in London for striking

Russia

- Teachers strike in Siberia
- Russian port workers strike over unpaid wages

Africa

- Zimbabwean government bans strikes
- Public sector workers strike in the Ivory Coast
- Algerian workers oppose privatisations

Greek workers to strike against government austerity measures

Railway workers, doctors at state-run hospitals, tram and bus drivers, teachers, tax and customs officials are set to take strike action in Greece this week. The disputes are to oppose government austerity measures being imposed for the country to qualify for the single European currency in 2001. With Britain, Denmark and Sweden opting out of joining the currency, Greece was the only European Union member state that failed to qualify for the first wave of euro membership in 1999.

Custom officers at Greece's northern border began five days of strike action on November 30 to protest government plans to restructure their pension fund. Traffic queues began to increase at the border posts with Macedonia and Bulgaria. Customs at borders, ports and airports are closed, blocking the delivery of food and fuel.

The government plans to merge the custom officers pension fund with that of other state employees. It is planning to take out a court injunction to force the end of the dispute. A government spokesman said, 'We will not negotiate any of our decisions.'

[Top of page](#)

French rail conductors strike for jobs

Last week French train conductors were involved in a second strike, following the recent European-wide dispute a few days earlier. On November 27, when train drivers returned to work, conductors in several regions voted to continue to strike to demand more jobs. Under French law trains are not allowed to move without a conductor.

On November 28 the national rail company SNCF reported that the dispute was hitting one in three trains from Paris to the south-east and south-west of the country, while services to other cities and between provincial cities would be cut by two-thirds. The dispute has not affected the TGV train service to London, Brussels and northern Europe cities.

Rail unions say the SNCF is cutting back staff under conditions of

increased use of the railways. On November 28, 29 and 30 conductors voted to extend the strike on a day-by-day basis. By November 30 the dispute forced the cancellation of over half of the trains between Paris and provincial towns and cities and two-thirds of rail services between provincial cities. Services on the Paris suburban commuter line which serves Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport were also hit.

There has been widespread public support for the rail workers disputes. A poll by the CSA company in the daily *Le Parisien* reported that 70 percent of those surveyed supported the action by rail workers throughout Europe, while 56 percent supported the action by the train conductors.

[Top of page](#)

Irish hospital workers strike against intimidation

Kitchen staff, porters and service workers at Waterford Regional Hospital took unofficial action last week to protest alleged bullying in the laundry section of the hospital. On November 26 the strike was supported by non-nursing grades at the hospital. The dispute has led to a laundry build-up, and cooked meals at the hospital have also been interrupted.

The 250 workers, members of the ATGWU, are being balloted for official strike action. In an attempt to break the dispute management have issued a call asking for members of the public to come to the hospital to help cook meals and clean laundry.

[Top of page](#)

Irish train drivers shut down railways in unofficial action

Three hundred train drivers in the Irish Republic took unofficial strike action on November 24, shutting down the rail network around Dublin and most of the country.

Over 60,000 commuters to and from Dublin took alternative forms of transport as the DART, Arrow and inter-rail services were shut down. Throughout the Republic 120,000 passengers were affected by the strike.

The strike followed disparaging comments about the train drivers last week by Iarnrod Eireann (Irish Railway) Chairman Brian Joyce. The company was in discussions with trade union representatives over its proposed cost-cutting package, which involves reducing the pay of train drivers. Negotiations have been ongoing for the past two years. The unofficial strike went ahead after the Labour Relations Commission failed to resolve the negotiations stalemate.

The rail branch secretary of SIPTU, Tony Tobin, said that he wanted any further action to be under the control of SIPTU. 'We regret any inconvenience to the public. We hope that these discussions can be put on a proper footing once and for all.'

[Top of page](#)

Scottish teachers union agrees to reinstate education curriculum

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), which agreed on November 20 to boycott the Scottish 'Higher Still' national curriculum following a vote by teachers, are now set to reverse that decision. Following a meeting with the Scottish education minister, Helen

Liddell, on November 24, the union's negotiating committee agreed to ask the union to suspend the boycott.

Teachers voted to boycott the curriculum, which was to be implemented next August, because it is unworkable with the present level of funding, resources and staff. The union and Liddell have not agreed that teachers' concerns be monitored by a 'liaison group'.

EIS General Secretary Ronnie Smith endorsed the agreement and called for 'Higher Still' to proceed. 'The boycott is not, has never been and never will be an end in itself. It is a means to an end of achieving the right conditions for the implementation of Higher Still,' he said.

Top of page

Sky Chef sacks 200 employees in London for striking

Sky Chefs, the biggest airline caterer in the world, fired 200 workers in London last month after a 24-hour strike for improvements in wages and working conditions. Any worker who wanted their job back had to sign a new contract which prevented any of the union grievances being put to the management.

Top of page

Teachers strike in Siberia

Teachers in several Siberian towns went on strike Wednesday, protesting the government's failure to pay them. Six thousand teachers went on strike in the Irkutsk region of Siberia, shutting down 123 schools. In one town, Ulkan, the teachers began a hunger strike, according to teachers union spokesman Yuri Bekshtanovsky.

Meanwhile, hospital workers in Russia's Far East went on a hunger strike, also demanding back pay. In the Far East, more than 40 hospital workers in the town of Elban joined a hunger strike called the day before by emergency medical workers in the nearby city of Amursk. Workers at the Elban hospital have not been paid for six months.

Teachers in eight schools in the surrounding Khabarovsk region went on strike Tuesday and teachers in other schools called a 'pre-strike alert', threatening to walk off their jobs if they are not paid.

Top of page

Russian port workers strike over unpaid wages

Over 9,000 ship repair and weapons systems workers at the Murmansk port in Russia held a 24-hour strike November 25 to demand the payment of more than six months of unpaid wages. Murmansk is the country's main northern naval port and is the base for many of the ships and submarines of the northern fleet. The workers handle ship repairs and also work on weapons systems in the port.

Union leaders at the plant said that if payment was not made before the end of the year, workers may carry out all-out strike action and would call for other factories and repair yards in the city to shut down.

Top of page

Zimbabwean government bans strikes

President Robert Mugabe issued a decree November 27 to ban "the inciting of, or taking part in, collective industrial action meant to put pressure on the government to change laws". Mugabe, who has faced a series of union-organised strikes over the past year because of rising fuel prices, outlawed strikes for six months and threatened to suspend unions which break the rule and jail organisers for up to three years.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) announced on Monday it was calling off additional one-day strikes, not out of fear of government repression, but because for the time the government had accepted its proposals to convene urgent talks over pressing economic problems. The ZCTU also said it would challenge Mugabe's ban in court.

A Tripartite Negotiating Forum of representatives from government,

business and the labour movement will meet on December 9. Besides the removal of a 67 percent fuel price increase, pushing up the cost of public transport, the ZCTU is urging Mugabe to reduce his ministerial team from 55 to 15, audit all government tenders, recover money lost through corruption, free state control of the media and adopt a new national constitution by next year.

Top of page

Public sector workers strike in the Ivory Coast

Civil servants in the West African state of Ivory Coast began an unprecedented strike Wednesday for better conditions. For the first time, UGTCI, the trades union federation formerly controlled by the government, has joined forces with other unions to press their demands, including the payment of pensions. Public sector workers are also angry about a new system of promotion in which advancement is decided by merit rather than length of service.

Top of page

Algerian workers oppose privatisations

Workers remain determined to fight a government program of privatisations despite the November 24 decision by the PTT to end a nine-day-old strike under the threat of mass sackings. Thirty-five thousand telecommunications workers began a strike November 16 to press authorities to double the year-end bonus to 4,000 dinars (\$70) and provide low interest loans for needy workers to build houses.

The same day PTT ended the strike Algeria's main labour union threatened a nation-wide strike over the privatisation of state-owned firms. 'We have adopted the principle of a general strike if our voice is not heard,' Sidi Said, head of the Union Generale des Travailleurs Algeriens (UGTA), said after a meeting of the umbrella labour group's leadership. However, critics say the strike call is hollow because many of UGTA's leaders enjoy close relations with the government.

The government's privatisation policy has increased the number of unemployed by massive layoffs in streamlined state enterprises. Official estimates put the number of jobless at around 30 percent in the country of 29 million. Algeria, hard-hit by declining oil prices, has recently witnessed a series of industrial actions against deteriorating economic conditions. University teachers are still pursuing their five-week-old strike to protest low wages.

See Also:

Workers Struggles: The Americas

[1 December 1998]

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

[28 November 1998]

Workers Struggles: Europe, Russia, the Middle East and Africa

[26 November 1998]



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact