

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Romanian public sector workers stage one day general strike

On October 5 up to 800,000 public sector workers struck in Romania to protest new legislation on salaries, including a freeze on public sector wages. The government of Prime Minister Emil Boc also plans to scrap many bonus schemes and introduce mandatory unpaid leave.

During the one day strike a demonstration was held in the capital, Bucharest. With up to 30,000 people in attendance the protest was the largest in the city for a decade. Public sector workers are campaigning for a minimum salary of 155 euros a month in 2010. The current minimum wage is around 145 euros.

Many demonstrators demanded the resignation of the government chanting slogans such as “Down with the government,” “Shame on you” and “Thieves! Thieves!”

The government is imposing a raft of austerity measures in order to slash its budget deficit. As well as attacks on wages, it plans to introduce a pension bill raising the retirement age to 65 by 2030. The current retirement ages are 63 for men and 58 for women. The measures are being implemented as part of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) and European Union 20-billion-euro rescue plan.

A further three-hour rally involving thousands of public sectors workers was held Bucharest on October 7.

France Télécom workers strike to protest increase in suicides due to stress

Employees at France Télécom began a two day strike on October 7 following a number of suicides workers blame on new working practices. Over the past 20 months, 24 company employees have committed suicide with many leaving notes blaming France Télécom management decisions or stress at work.

Trade unions estimated that up to 40 percent of France Telecom’s 100,000 employees participated in the stoppage. Rallies were also held in Paris and several other towns and cities.

Unite calls off strike by tram workers in Sheffield, England

The Unite trade union called off a planned three-day strike by Stagecoach Supertram workers in Sheffield, England, on October 7.

Last week staff employed by Stagecoach Supertram voted to strike in opposition to a pay freeze. The workers had voted by a majority of 135 to 15 for action up to and including a strike.

The action was scheduled to take place from October 15 to October 17 and was to coincide with industrial action by bus drivers at First’s Sheffield depot.

A report in the local *Sheffield Telegraph* stated, “Stagecoach has now offered Supertram employees a two-year deal, which includes a one-off, three-figure payment in year one, followed by an annual increase from next May. The revised pay offer will be put to a ballot of union members on October 21 and 22.”

Last year Stagecoach made a profit of £170.8 million.

Nigeria: University academics' strike may be suspended

Members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) look set to suspend their strike. They have been on all-out strike since June 22, clocking up over 100 days of strike action.

The strike was a result of the failure of the federal government to endorse a report produced by a government committee in 2006, to renegotiate the 2001 agreement with the union. The 2001 agreement included the need for increased university funding, as well as staff salaries and conditions.

The union National Executive Council (NEC) met with government representatives in Abuja this week. New negotiations followed the intervention by Edo state governor Adams Oshiomhole at the behest of the Nigerian President Umaru Yar'Adua. Oshiomhole had previously been president of the Nigeria Labour Congress.

Following a two day continuous discussion, the NEC announced any decision to end the strike would have to be agreed by the various branch chapters of the union. However, the comments by Oshiomhole, following the negotiations, would seem to indicate a halt to the strike. He said, "Both parties have agreed that once ASUU suspends the strike, the remaining issues would be resolved in a very short time...."

Action by cement factory workers in Nigeria

Workers at the Obajana factory in Kogi State have taken action to protest their conditions. The factory, part of the Dangote group of companies, is one of the biggest cement producing factories in Africa. Action taken by workers included a blockade using heavy trucks.

Amongst the workers grievances are lack of medical attention for those injured on the job, the refusal of management to allow workers to join a union, low pay and lack of promotion.

Zimbabwe: striking mine workers forced back to work

Striking asbestos miners from the Shabanie mine in the town of Zvishavane have been forced back to work, following visits to their homes by police and mine security staff, according to a report carried by SW Radio Africa (London).

A recent demonstration held by the miners and their families, was fired on by police, and three miners were injured and required hospital treatment.

The miners had been on strike in a protest over unpaid wages dating back to January. Following the intimidation of the miners, around three quarters of the workforce of over 2,000 have reported back for work.



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