

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

20 November 2009

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

Italy: Thousands join recession protest

Over 100,000 people demonstrated November 14 on the streets of Rome to demand greater government action to tackle the recession, according to AFP.

The leader of Italy's main trade union, CGIL, Guglielmo Epifani, said Silvio Berlusconi's government was doing nothing to help workers or retired people.

Several hundred thousand people gathered for a similar protest in April.

Bosnia: Civil servants strike over budget impasse

Civil servants in the Bosnian city of Mostar went on strike November 16 after the city council failed for the 17th time to elect a city mayor or to adopt a budget.

The president of the Mostar public servants' union, Emir Topuz, told journalists, "We do not like being forced to take this action ... but it is the only way left for us to protect our rights and to finally make this city functional. We do not do this only because of our salaries, we do it for the citizens because the city is falling into ruin."

Mostar firefighters have announced they will join the strike by blocking several roads, including the M17 highway that links the country with Croatia. Firefighters said they would continue to block the roads until the city council adopts a budget.

Mostar has had no mayor or budget since the October 2008 local elections, because the Muslim and Croat parties have been unable to agree on a power-sharing arrangement.

The city has made no payments to its employees since September, when the July decision for temporary financing imposed by the international community's High Representative to Bosnia officially expired.

Romania: Subway workers strike in Bucharest

Transport workers employed by Bucharest's subway company Metrorex planned a nine-hour general strike November 17, after the transport ministry rejected their request for a 26 percent pay increase.

Instead the government is offering only 23 percent, plus the annulment of holiday and gift vouchers.

Union representatives are demanding negotiations for a new collective labour contract following the expiry of the previous one at the beginning of this month.

According to Associated Press, transport minister Radu Berceanu says he may take the Metrorex workers to court. A similar strike was pronounced illegal in 2005.

Around 300,000 passengers were expected to face some disruption.

According to the metro workers union, USLM, the productivity of underground workers has increased by 30 percent from 2008. Four new stations have recently opened, with no increase in staff numbers; significantly increasing Metrorex's profits. During the past year, the number of passengers has also increased from 300,000 to 650,000 per day.

The Ministry of Finance and European Investment Bank recently finalized a €395 million (\$587 million) loan to support the modernization of Bucharest's metro network. The total value of the metro network modernization project is estimated at €883 million.

Serbia: Teachers in warning protest

Teachers held a warning protest November 16 to call attention to their opposition to the Education System Law and the announced job rationalizations.

If the protest fails to have results, the teachers' union has announced that it will gather signatures in support of a new law.

Education Minister Zarko Obradovic, said that he did not see any reason for the warning strike.

Russia: 'Work slowdown' at General Motors

Workers at the General Motors (GM) plant in St. Petersburg have begun a work slowdown.

Production has dropped by one third.

Among the workers' demands are: guarantee of a standard 40-hour work week, wage increases at the rate of inflation plus 8 percent, and vacation times not determined by management.

Finland: Pilots' strike leads to flight cancellations

A strike by 800 pilots employed by the Finnish airline Finnair on November 16-17 led to the cancellation of over 200 flights. The dispute focused on plans by Finnair to outsource some of its services, primarily the use of outside labour on its flight decks.

The union has already agreed to cost-cutting measures, including cuts in pay, a higher retirement age, and reduced benefits.

Finnair has estimated that its losses stemming from the strike will be €2.5-5 million (\$3.7-7.5 million) a day.

Ireland: Senior civil servants vote for one-day strike

Senior civil servants have voted to join the planned national public sector strike scheduled for November 24.

The *Irish Times* wrote November 17, "In what is seen as a hardening of attitudes, members of the Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants (AHCPS), which represents principal officers and assistant principal officers as well as other grades such as prison governors and court registrars, yesterday voted by 60 percent to 40 percent to take part.

"The move represents an effective reversal of a decision taken by the union last March when members voted by a similar margin not to participate in industrial action planned at that stage."

The paper revealed that principal officers in the Civil Service can earn between €84,000 (\$125,260) and €111,000 (\$165,523), while the salary scale for assistant principals ranges from €64,500 (\$95,879) to €88,600 (\$132,120).

The union said its members had already endured an effective pay cut of up to 17 percent as a result of the introduction of income and pension levies.

On November 24, senior civil servants will join thousands of teachers, nurses and other public servants who are set to undertake a one-day stoppage in protest at government proposals to cut wages.

Nigeria: Kaduna state hospital workers in strike action

Health workers, belonging to six health professional associations in the northern state of Kaduna, began three days of strike action Monday, November 16. Amongst the concerns of the health workers are the poor

health infrastructure. They are protesting at the lack of maintenance and upgrading of medical equipment and want more health workers to be employed in order to cope with the increase in hospital attendance.

Their main demand is for health workers in Kaduna state to be given the same salary structure and conditions as health workers in the other Nigerian states. The lower pay and lesser conditions of service lead to a constant outflow of health workers from Kaduna to other states.

Dr. Williams Ayet, chairman of the Kaduna Health Workers Consultative Forum, accused the state government of employing foreign doctors at three times the salary they are seeking, to circumvent the strike.

Ekiti state civil servants still awaiting payment of salary arrears

An aide to the Ekiti state governor, Kola Adefemi, speaking to the press on November 13 said that the failure to pay arrears to state civil servants was due to a budget shortage and blamed the fact that the election for state governor had to be re-run last May.

Adefemi disputed the union claim that the amount of arrears owed was two months and instead said it was just over two weeks.

The civil servants had taken two days of strike action at the beginning of the month over the failure of the state government to pay them their October salaries. Responding to the aide's remarks, the secretary of the state Nigerian Labour Congress, Abidemi Alaafiaty, said, "The state government has more than enough to pay salaries and allowances ... the government should ensure the prompt and regular payment of workers' salary."

Moroccan journalists' union denounces jail sentences

The National Union of the Moroccan Press and the Reporters without Borders organisation have condemned the conviction of two journalists working for the daily *Al Massae* newspaper.

Rachid Nini was sentenced to three months in jail and Said Laajal to two months at a court in Casablanca. They were accused of misinformation in the reporting of the bust of a drug trafficking operation by police in the north of Morocco. The journalists had claimed the real culprits had not been caught. Nini said, "My sentence is intimidation. What's needed is to pursue the real traffickers."

Several other journalists working for the mass circulation *Al Massae* have been jailed recently, accused of giving misinformation about the royal family.



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