

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

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

Subway workers in Bucharest end strike after court rules it illegal

Industrial action by subway workers in Bucharest, Romania ended on November 18 after the Bucharest City Court deemed it illegal. The subway workers, employed by Metrorex, had struck during the two previous days in pursuit of a 20 percent pay increase.

Metrorex had filed two complaints with the court in its attempt to break the strike. The first was with the Bucharest Court of Appeals for the suspension of the strike. It also filed with the Bucharest Municipal Tribunal based on contesting the legality of the stoppage.

The strike led to the closure of the Metrorex subway network, which is used by 600,000 people daily. Extra buses and trams were provided throughout the city in order to provide the means for them to travel around the capital.

The trade unions involved in the dispute immediately accepted the ruling. Trade union leader Ioan Radoi said, "We will resume normal traffic, but I would add that the conflict remains open. We will continue to seek a solution for all issues."

The dispute began in late October when Metrorex opposed pay increase demands on the basis of Government Emergency Ordinance no. 99. This ensured that the government would not allot funds to cover pay rises, because Metrorex's performance was being monitored as one of nine state-run firms by the International Monetary Fund.

A day of industrial action was held on November 1, 2009 with a further two-day strike on November 12.

Trade unions sell-out Leeds refuse workers strike

Refuse workers in Leeds, West Yorkshire, England ended their 11-week strike on November 23. Some 600 workers, members of the Unison and GMB trade unions, were involved in the dispute against Leeds City Council. The workers struck after the council put forward plans to cut workers pay by up to a third—£6,000 annually in some cases. These cuts were planned under the guise of complying with national equal pay legislation.

Workers voted by a majority of 79 percent in favour of the deal after it was recommended to them by the trade unions in a mass meeting. The unions have claimed that the strike has been a victory. This is despite the fact that initial details that have been revealed show that 20 of the workers will lose pay and the whole deal is centred on productivity increases and

performance related pay for all workers. Some of the workers will lose hundreds of pounds. The trade union negotiating team's final agreed document states that "Streetscene attendant GNP—were set to lose £2,634 and they continue to lose but the gap has been cut to £543."

The pay of other refuse workers has yet to be finalised in the deal and could still be cut and subject to productivity increases. According to the document, "Waste site sorting attendants—were set to lose £1,280. Their post is currently being reviewed and both sides are confident that the review will close any pay gap. That review is due to be completed by the end of December."

Under the agreement the trade unions will be integral to forcing through the new productivity hikes and performance related pay. Under the section "Performance pay", the agreed document states that "a new performance pay system will be introduced for refuse collectors by June 2010". The new performance related scheme "based on group/area working will be jointly devised by management and trade union representatives," the deal continues.

According to the GMB, each of its members had lost an average of £3,000 in pay during the strike.

Tony Pearson, the Unison regional organiser and one of the negotiators of the deal said, "The council will achieve substantial improvements through productivity and modernisation, but whereas before we were talking about 220 bins every contractual hour, we are now talking about *a more achievable figure which will be finalised in due course.*" [Emphasis added]

Commenting on the deal, the *Yorkshire Post* said, "The deal maintains—and in some cases improves—current salaries in return for a series of efficiency and productivity improvements.

"A similar offer made five weeks ago was overwhelmingly rejected. Strikers had said some of the productivity targets, particularly a requirement to collect bins from 220 homes per hour, were unachievable."

Workers strike at Pompidou Centre in Paris, France

Workers employed at the Pompidou Centre in Paris began strike action on Monday to protest planned job cuts. The strike forced the closure of the modern and contemporary art centre and was extended by a day.

According to trade unions up to 400 of the 1,100 jobs at the centre are to be lost over the next 10 years. The government plans to implement these job losses by not replacing retiring staff. More than 40 percent of staff employed at the Pompidou Centre are aged 50 or over.

Teachers strike at school in Coventry, England to protest cuts

Teachers at the Woodlands School and Sports College in Coventry, England struck on November 20 to protest extra workloads. The one-day strike at the 1,000 pupil school was called by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and involved 40 members of the union. According to the NUT six qualified teaching jobs have been cut at the school since September.

The strike was not supported by the ATL and NASUWT trade unions, whose members worked as normal.

One striker told the local Coventry Telegraph that staff were working without breaks and were taking extra lessons. He said, "Staff are frazzled. It's a simple connection between less teachers and more teaching for the rest of us."

Drivers strike at East London Bus Group

Drivers employed by the East London Bus Group struck staged a 24-hour strike on November 20 in an ongoing dispute. The workers, members of the Unite trade union, were protesting a pay freeze by the company.

The action involved about 2,300 drivers and had a severe impact on commuters as it affected 58 bus routes across east London and the City of London, the financial district. Among the day and evening services affected were routes in Barking, Bow, Leyton, Romford, Upton Park and West Ham.

The action follows a 24-hour strike held on November 9.

Slovenian paper mill workers strike in pay dispute

On November 19, some 450 employees began a six-hour strike at the Radece Paper Mill in Slovenia. The workers, who are demanding higher pay, began the action after a breakdown in negotiations between trade unions and management.

Ghana: Teachers take industrial action

University teachers belonging to the Teachers and Educational Workers' Union (TEWU) at the University of Ghana and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology took unofficial strike action last week. They struck after promised arrears of salary were not paid. Last January the teachers were awarded a 17 percent pay increase. After negotiations the increments for January through to July were supposed to be paid in two instalments in September and October.

The TEWU held meetings with the teachers to discuss the situation, but the teachers responded by taking the unofficial action. TEWU general secretary, Daniel Anim-Antwi, appealed to his members to return to work. The union instead plans to lodge a formal complaint with the National Labour Commission over the non-payment of arrears.

In a separate dispute, school teachers belonging to the National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT) have voted to begin strike action Monday 30 November. Their main grievance is the government's plan to reduce teacher's responsibility and car maintenance allowances. The teachers have been involved in protracted negotiations with the Education Ministry for the last three years over emoluments to pay.

Nigeria: NIPPS workers protest against unpaid allowances

Workers at the prestigious National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPPS), based in Kuru in Plateau state, took strike action last week to protest against unpaid allowances. The workers are members of the Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions (NASU).

The chairman of the NIPPS branch, Moses Kwanga, explained why the workers had timed their strike just prior to the graduation of those currently on a course at NIPPS. He said, "We chose this period to voice our grievances because prominent Nigerians ... visit the institute and they can intervene on our behalf."

Kaduna health workers suspend strike action

Health workers in Kaduna state, Nigeria, who had been striking have suspended their action. The Kaduna state head of service, Alhaji Habib Balarabe, after visiting several hospitals said one of the state government's major priorities was the health sector and promised to address the workers' demands.

Amongst those demands was the upgrading of medical equipment and for Kaduna state to bring pay and conditions for health workers in line with those in other states. Currently there is an outflow of health staff from Kaduna to other states.

The striking health workers had received the support of the Kaduna based Civil Rights Congress (CRC). The CRC president Mallam Shehu Sani, in a statement said, "The health sector in Kaduna State is in a state of paralysis due to abject neglect, apathy, lack of funding and insensitivity by successive (state) governments.... In a situation whereby public office holders and their families can afford to travel overseas for cataract treatment, other Nigerians too deserve better treatment at home; no one's life is better than the other."



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