

# Government and union shut down Romanian teachers' strike

Andrei Tudora, Tina Zamfir  
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The national strike of Romanian teachers was broken up on Monday, June 12, in a blatant act of betrayal and collusion with the authorities by the union bureaucracy. The strike involved hundreds of thousands of education workers, many of whom participated in rallies and demonstrations throughout the country for several weeks.

The teachers' strike has formed part of a surge in industrial actions in the country, with workers in healthcare, on the railways and subways, and miners all engaged in some form of industrial action. Under these conditions the teachers' union has been working hand in glove with the government to end the strike.

One major objective underlay this reactionary move. The union bureaucracy is fearful of a broader movement of the working class which would threaten its control over the workers and undermine the pro-capitalist and militarist agenda of the government which the union supports.

The Romanian ruling class is attempting to use the crisis created by the pandemic and the drive to war against Russia to bolster its position as one of imperialism's main client states in the Balkans and Black Sea region.

The ambitions of the Romanian oligarchy were spelled out by NATO vice president and Romanian PSD politician Mircea Geoana. Geoana spoke of a "historical opportunity" for the Romanian bourgeoisie:

"[...] I will say one thing: the entire modern history of Romania is made up of chances taken by the Romanian elites, in moments of geopolitical shocks. This is how Little Romania [Old Kingdom] was born. Little Romania was born after the Crimean war, Greater Romania was born after the First World War and Western Romania was born after the fall of Communism. [...] For the first time in the history of this

country, called Romania, we will no longer be a frontier country, but the new center of gravity of Europe. It is important, beyond this war, because Europe is being reconfigured."

A vast expansion of military spending and acquisitions is accompanied by EU-wide deficit reduction and austerity measures. The teachers' main demands, for an end to poverty wages and for the allocation of 6 percent of GDP to education, were seen as incompatible with the government's fundamental aims.

The government has broken its own laws in order to impose as much as possible of the cost of the war and economic crisis on the workers. It has "postponed" for the past 12 years the law that requires the allocation of 6 percent of GDP to education. It also refused to apply the salary law dating from 2017 which provided for annual pay increase for state employees. The 2017 law, which did not account for the explosive increase in prices in recent years, was never applied by the authorities for many categories of workers, including teachers and healthcare workers.

Negotiations were conducted in bad faith by the government, which never had any intention of giving an inch to the teachers, lest it encourage other sections of workers to demand increases. From the first days of the strike, the government issued ultimatums to the teachers. Its offer centered on the application of the 2017 law and a scheme for yearly bonuses of around 300 euros.

Teachers repeatedly rejected these ultimatums, despite the union leadership's attempts to ram them through.

On June 10 at night, union executives and government officials told teachers they had until June 11 at 9am to accept the latest offer. Teachers protested

against this obvious provocation, made worse by the fact that it was composed of different packages, and obscured by formulas and different indices. The unions not only did not explain the offer to the membership, they did not carry out even formal consultations. Teachers were forced to employ their own juridical and economic experts.

On June 12, after a morning meeting with the government, union bosses “suspended” the strike until the government passes legislation that includes Saturday night’s “offer”. Teachers were caught unawares, only learning about the betrayal from television. Protests were held in Suceava county, with educators storming the offices of county unions. Others denounced the betrayal on social media.

The offer for which the union had broken up the strike was presented to the public as a “25% increase in wages, yearly bonuses and a 50% increase from 1st of January 2024.”

This is a complete fraud. The government passed two emergency laws on June 12. One of them required the government to apply the 2017 salary law, at the level of 2022, as well as an additional raise equal to 50 percent of the difference between the base salary and the expected base salary on January 1, 2024. Additionally, auxiliary teaching staff will receive 260 euros before taxes, and non-teaching staff will receive 80 euros, starting from June.

The second emergency law refers to a “teaching career bonus” sum of 400 euros for teachers and 100 euros for non-teaching staff, to be paid in the month of October. This payment, that the government called “a national measure to support educational activity”, is set to take place annually until 2027 and is tied to work-related expenditure.

The unions have made much of the government’s inclusion of the “principle” that the salary of debutante teachers will be calculated “based off” the median base salary in the country, starting from 2024. But as teachers have stated, the government has proven that it will not honor its own laws, let alone any future principles.

The actual wage increase for all the workers is close to zero, especially when considering lost wages and benefits for the duration of the strike. Romanian teachers earn between 500 and 850 euros, depending on seniority.

Workers must draw the necessary lessons of this bitter experience. The teachers’ strike has shown the power of the working class. But in order for these struggles to move forward, it is necessary to break from the outmoded trade unions and organize independent rank-and-file Committees that establish connections to workers in other sectors and countries across Europe and internationally.

The struggles of Romanian workers are part an international resurgence of the class struggle. Workers all over the world are rising up against massive attacks on living standards and on democratic rights as every aspect of society is subordinated to the war effort. The objective conditions exist for a powerful joint offensive by the international working class against social inequality and war. But this requires the construction of new organizations of struggle and a socialist orientation and perspective.



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