

ETUC declares October action month for higher wages

Date

Thursday, October 6, 2022 - 12:00

Workers and people across Europe are suffering from soaring inflation. In the recent meetings of EPSU's affiliates in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, we heard from unions facing similar challenges and making similar demands. Energy costs in particular are hitting households hard with people having to devote a large part of their incomes to heating, or even worse having to choose between heating or eating. Some workers are refusing to take it anymore, like the waste collectors in Budapest who, on 4 October, refused to drive their trucks out and demanded that the employer compensate them for the high inflation. Negotiations were ongoing at the time of writing. Several unions are engaged in similar actions across Europe, with the ETUC organising an action in Strasbourg on 5 October and Czech and Slovak unions out on the streets in Prague and in Bratislava on the 8th.

Our demands

The European Council meets to discuss what can be done and we are calling on the EU to take urgent steps. These involve introducing a cap on energy prices, decoupling the electricity price setting mechanism from gas prices, imposing a tax on the windfall profits made by energy companies and reforming the electricity market. We want Member States to put in place additional support, for example through energy vouchers targeted at low- and middle-income households, or an extension of social tariffs. As some companies lose their markets and are threatened with closure we want to reactivate and strengthen solidarity mechanisms (such as SURE) to support short-time work and workers that would be temporarily laid-off. Any state aid should be conditional, based on strong social and environmental criteria. Why give money to companies that violate labour laws, do not invest in the transition to zero carbon emissions or avoid paying their taxes?

No return to austerity

The message from the European Council should be unequivocal: no return to austerity. We have reports that high energy costs are impacting hospitals, nursing homes, schools and public administrations while governments argue they can't compensate public service workers for inflation as they have to pay for energy. This cannot be. Public services cannot be depleted of resources or public service workers asked to bear the brunt of savings when public debts are being accumulated for military spending or assisting companies that make profits. EPSU supports all public service workers and all their unions in their just demands. Public service workers and the services we deliver are crucial and public service workers deserve decent pay increases. Success to you all.

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