

Workers Struggles: Europe and the Middle East

9 December 1999

Romanian rail workers strike

On December 6, Romanian rail workers began national strike action to demand a 70 percent pay rise, disrupting local and international services. To undermine the action, which was organised by the main rail unions and the National Trade Union Bloc, Transport Minister Traian Basescu requested that the state-run Tarom airline and several bus companies be mobilised to carry passengers. The strike continued on December 7 and negotiations between the unions and the transport ministry did not result in any agreement. On Monday Dumitru Sandel, a rail union leader, had called on the ministry to cut back on rail maintenance to pay for the wage increase. The government has rejected the proposal, and has so far offered only a 20 percent pay rise.

Czech miners end occupation

Czech coal miners at a pit in the northern part of the country ended a 42-hour sit-in strike early on December 3. Around 180 miners took part in the sit-in at the Kahinoor mine, after shareholders voted to close the pit, with the loss of up to 950 jobs. The occupation ended following an agreement by the government and Mostecka Uhelna, Kahinoor's owners, to hold talks on the mine's future and agree a solution by December 7. The miners union is calling for a government subsidy to keep the loss-making pit open.

Italian telecom company to sack thousands of workers

On December 2, Telecom Italia announced that it is to shed 13,500 jobs within two years. The figure was 500 more than originally planned. The company announced the cuts while simultaneously stating that it intended to take on another 6,200 staff, half of whom will be employed by its TIM mobile phone arm.

Giampiero Castano, the national secretary of the FIOM telecoms union, said that the Telecom workers

would vote on a number of short strikes and that national strike action was probable after the holiday season. Another union representative said the total number of jobs lost could reach 30,000.

German auto manufacturer to lay off 4,000 workers

Opel, the German arm of General Motors, announced on December 6 that it is to slash 4,000 jobs at its plant in Bochum by 2004. At present 14,100 workers are employed at the plant and the job losses are part of a restructuring package. The plant manufactures the company's Astra and Zafira models and the company also plans to cut costs by purchasing more of its components from outside suppliers. Opel said that the job losses were necessitated by the vast over-capacity in the car industry and that it had made a "significant" operating loss in 1998. Last year the firm cut a further 4,000 jobs by introducing an early retirement plan at its headquarters in Ruesselsheim, near Frankfurt, by 2003. Opel employs 45,000 workers at its four plants in Ruesselsheim, Bochum, Eisenach and Kaiserslautern.

Lebanon's teachers take industrial action in pay dispute

Over 60,000 teachers in Lebanese state and private schools held a one-day strike on December 7 in a dispute to demand a pay rise. The strike was called by several teaching unions in the country and stopped classes normally attended by 800,000 pupils. The average wage for a teacher working in Lebanon's state schools is \$500 a month while a teacher in private schools is paid an average of \$700. The government has stated that it cannot provide pay rises because of a lack of funds and a \$19 billion public debt.



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