

# Workers Struggles: Europe and Africa

17 February 2000

## **Hungarian rail strike ends as union calls off dispute**

The longest rail strike in Hungary in 100 years ended on February 15. The 14-day strike involving 56,000 workers ended with both management and the trade unions claiming victory. The three railway unions called off the strike as of 5:00 p.m. local time, stating that they had extracted key concessions from the state railway company MAV, including a wage increase, assurances on limiting layoffs and a collective bargaining agreement.

An agreement settling the dispute had not been signed as of February 15 and the trade unions admitted that some other issues had still to be negotiated in relation to a settlement. The leader of the Rail Workers Union, Istvan Gask, said, "With this [agreement], we can continue negotiations on remaining open questions and, we hope, successfully conclude these negotiations".

MAV said that the strike had failed. A company official told a press conference, "It seems they could bear it for two weeks and then they threw in the towel." It is believed that MAV and the unions have agreed to a wage increase of 8.5 percent (inflation plus 2.5 percent) for the next three years. This is very close to the original offer MAV made to its workforce.

## **Striking Romanian teachers demonstrate against government**

Fifteen thousand Romanian teachers demonstrated in Bucharest on February 11 on the fourth day of their second nation-wide pay strike this year. Some of those on the demonstration shouted anti-government slogans including "Thieves", "We don't give in" and "Romanian schools want to live".

The strike has been supported by the vast majority of Romania's 400,000 teachers and has been called in support of a demand for a basic monthly wage of 1.5 million lei (\$81), from the present 664,000 lei. The teachers are also calling on the government to allocate a minimum of 4 percent of gross domestic product to the

education budget. They have stated that they will not complete the curriculum for this academic year or give students graduation marks unless their demands are met.

## **Irish bus drivers strike to demand pay rise**

On February 15 bus drivers took strike action in Dublin to demand a 20 percent increase in pay. Around 200,000 commuters were hit by the stoppage that halted bus services in the city. The strike is the outcome of a dispute stretching back to last summer. At that time the management of Dublin Bus refused to agree a pay rise. The company insisted that it would not exceed the pay rises set out in the tripartite Partnership 2000 economic pact agreed between the unions, government and employers.

## **Teachers demonstrate in London against performance-related pay**

Around 1,000 teachers from across England demonstrated in London on February 12 against the proposed introduction of performance-related pay in school classrooms. A number of teachers attended the demonstration dressed in Victorian clothing to symbolise the last time such a system operated.

The march and rally was organised by the STOPP campaign—School Teachers Opposed to Performance Pay. The secretary of the organisation, Kevin Courtney, said that the trade union he belonged to, the National Union of Teachers, had been founded originally to end the Victorian system of performance pay.

Last week the government published its performance-related pay national criteria, against which teachers applying for a new salary scale would be measured. Those teachers hoping to receive a £2,000 pay rise and access to the higher pay scale would have to show how they helped pupils improve on their previous best results.

The STOPP campaign is to hold a lobby of the Department of Education on March 1.

## **British Ford staff receive support from their**

### **German colleagues for industrial action**

Technical, design and professional staff at the automaker Ford, who last week voted to take strike action in pursuit of a pay increase, have received support from their fellow workers in Germany. Trade union representatives at Ford's European Works Council in Germany have said that their members will not be "strike breakers". Ford unions in Germany have agreed not to undertake work transferred there during the industrial action.

The 3,000 British workers are to strike for five days over the next fortnight demanding a 15 percent pay increase to achieve wages parity with the company's production staff. The workers, members of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union, are to begin their strike with a one-hour stoppage on February 21. The union has also announced that an overtime ban will take place. Further strikes are to include one-day stoppages on February 24 and 29 and a three-day strike from March 6.

### **Serbian teachers continue strike**

The teachers strike in Serbia entered its eleventh day February 11. The teachers are demanding a salary increase and payment of unpaid wages. The strike, called by four teaching unions, involves teachers from 770 elementary and high schools across the country. A total of 48 percent of teachers in Serbia are estimated to have joined the dispute.

### **Students and workers unite in Southern Tunisia**

Student protests have occurred in the majority of Tunisia's southern cities in the last few days. Education Minister Iyadh el-Ouderni held a press conference early this week denying the "rumours concerning the amendment of the examination system in secondary schools", and stressing that the ministry has not made any decision to change the system.

The student protests included the colleges of Gafsa, the scene of protests around the same time last year, and in Gabes, Zarzis, Jerba and Medenine. Students at the main college of Jerba took to the streets chanting slogans demanding the change of the college administration.

The protests in southern cities were supported by the unemployed, who make up 17 percent of the population, as well as workers of the British company British Gas at the natural gas plant on the outskirts of Sfax, the largest of Tunisia's southern cities. They were

also responding to the announcement of plans to dismiss a number of workers.



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