

# Workers Struggles: Europe

25 May 2000

## **Belgium shop workers take nation-wide strike action**

On May 20, workers at the Belgian supermarket chain GB (GBIBt.BR) struck for 24 hours in a national dispute. The strike closed 129 Maxi and Super GB stores. The workers struck after union representatives failed to reach an agreement with management over a new profit-related pay agreement.

GB reported an operating loss of 20.5 million euros (\$18.27 million) in 1999 and said it would not pay bonuses to staff for 1999. It proposed a new system of payments based on meeting group targets.

## **Brussels airport fire fighters strike over pay and conditions**

Fire fighters at Belgium's main airport in Brussels struck on May 16 in a dispute over the hiring of part-time staff, overtime procedures and job security. The workers had intended to strike for 24 hours from 2 p.m., but the action was called off at 7 p.m. after talks between the minister of telecommunications and state-owned companies, airport executives and union leaders.

The strike by the fire fighters employed by state-controlled airport operator Biac led to the Belgian airline Sabena cancelling all its flights for 24 hours. The airline said the dispute had caused it losses of hundreds of millions of Belgian francs. During the strike, flights had to be redirected from Brussels to Paris, Luxembourg, Amsterdam and the Belgian city of Liege.

## **Romanian nuclear plant workers begin industrial action**

Workers at Romania's only nuclear plant began strike action May 19 in a dispute over pay. The workers struck at the 750-megawatt plant in the town of Cernavoda and refused to load the nuclear reactor with uranium fuel.

The staff are demanding a 25 percent pay increase and more holidays. Within hours a tribunal in the capital Bucharest ruled the strike illegal. The owners of

the plant, the Nuclearelectrica company, issued a statement following the ruling threatening the strikers with legal action if they continued their protest. The company said it would be able to operate for weeks with its present supplies of fuel. The plant produces about 10 percent of Romania's electricity.

## **Ferry workers in UK set to strike**

British ferry workers may strike this summer, after the seafarers union Numast rejected a pay offer from the P&O ferry company of between 1.2 and 1.4 percent. The union will now ballot its 600 P&O members for industrial action later this month. Numast, which represents 18,000 seafarers, said that it might strike during the peak summer period. This would include a strike during sailings to the Euro 2000 soccer championships in Holland and Belgium in June.

P&O are expected to announce a large increase in profits and the numbers of passengers at its forthcoming Annual General Meeting in London. A spokesman for Numast said, "P&O will present a rosy picture of its trading position to shareholders, but it gives a different picture to us. It is telling us that because it has lost duty-free sales it cannot afford a bigger pay rise."



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