

Workers Struggles: Europe & Africa

28 March 2003

Romanian workers demonstrate against planned job losses

Eight thousand workers protested in two Romanian cities on March 26, in opposition to government plans to slash thousands of jobs.

About 6,000 workers and their supporters marched through the central city of Brasov 150 kilometres (90 miles) northwest of Bucharest. The demonstration was the third consecutive in the city. In the western city of Hunedoara, 350 kilometres (about 220 miles) northwest of Bucharest around 2,000 steel workers protested.

The government plans to shed some 19,000 jobs at a number of unprofitable state enterprises. Privatisation Minister Ovidiu Musetescu said in February that the Hunedoara plant had debts worth \$US260 million and was losing \$US500,000 every day.

French bank workers in one-day strike

On March 24, several French unions representing workers at the Bank of France organised a 24-hour national strike against restructuring measures.

Four different models for restructuring the Bank of France have been proposed, including closing between 100 and 190 of the existing 211 branches. Managers have so far said they would prefer to maintain 62, meaning the loss of 3,200 jobs from the existing 9,300 workforce.

Some 60 percent of staff at the bank's Paris branches participated in the strike. There were a number of small protests in other French regions, including a large meeting in Marseille.

The unions have said that if the issue is not resolved, they intend to convene a national protest demonstration, probably on May 6.

French metalworkers strike continues

Metalworkers employed at three factories in Issoire and Ancizes are continuing their strike for higher wages, which began on February 25.

The industrial action involves about 2,000 workers employed by the Aubert et Duval group. Wages at other

group plants have been increased, although most of the workers do not earn much more than 1,000 euros a month.

The strike was called after management at the three plants proposed an increase of just 0.5 percent. Entrances to the factories have been blocked, stopping deliveries. Demonstrations have also been held in Ancizes, Issoire and Clermont-Ferrand, where eggs were thrown against the social office headquarters.

Workers later rejected a pay deal of 2 percent. They are demanding a 6 percent increase, or 55 euros for all employees and 200 euros compensation for those workers employed recently.

In response management wrote threatening letters to each individual striker and sought legal action against them through the courts. On March 14, the law courts repeated their refusal to prosecute the workers and to send police to arrest the strikers. The court agreed that an additional week of negotiation should take place without police evacuation actions.

Train guards in England to strike

Train guards are to take three days of strike action on March 28, 31 and April 17 in a dispute over their role and job description.

The strike is being organised by the Rail Maritime and Transport Union at nine train companies. The companies involved are Silverlink, ScotRail, Thames Trains, Connex South Eastern, Govia South Central, Arriva Trains Merseyside, Central Trains, Virgin Cross Country and Virgin West Coast.

The strike action was called by the union following a breakdown in six hour-long negotiations with management.

Striking South African miners defy court

Most of the miners at Impala Platinum Mines (Implats), Rustenburg, South Africa, are staying out on strike to demand improvements in their benefits in defiance of both their union, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), and a court order obtained by

their employers.

The miners have now been on strike more than a week. They are demanding payments for provident funds and risk assurance cover, in addition to funeral benefits for employees who die as a result of non-work related causes.

Implats issued ultimatums to employees to return to work within days of the start of the strike, and obtained a court ruling from the Labour Court to back this up. At a mass meeting called by the NUM on Thursday, March 20, the NUM urged the miners to go home for a long weekend and then return to work on Monday. Pamphlets were issued explaining that they could be sacked if they failed to do so.

NUM Deputy General Secretary Archie Palane said the union had called on the miners to return to work and leave the NUM and Impala management to discuss the issues of the provident fund benefits and risk cover.

However, according to an article by the South African Press Association, 15,000 of the 18,000 strikers did not report for work on the Monday as instructed. Management blamed the stay-away on a “small dissident group” who are “attempting to prevent” the thousands of miners from going into work.

Zambian teachers strike to win pay rise

Teachers at schools in Kitwe, Lusaka and Ndola in Zambia are on strike to demand a pay rise of K1.5 million per year (\$US3,093). Primary and secondary schools are involved.

Primary teachers in Ndola, on strike for one week so far, will be joined by secondary teachers on March 31 unless the government relents. The strikers have said they decided to go on strike in accordance with an agreement by the three teachers’ unions.

Nigerian government tries to split academic strikers

The Nigerian government has declared that it is now willing to make payments to universities from a “Presidential Special Grant” of N3.78 billion (\$US30 million), but only to universities not involved in the current strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).

The ASUU has carried out a long-running campaign for the reinstatement of 44 lecturers who were sacked from the University of Ilorin three years ago, after they took part in a previous strike. Since Ilorin has been the only university not to be affected by the strike, it has

been the only beneficiary of the new fund so far, receiving N150 million (\$US1.2 million).

The University of Ilorin has consistently refused to reinstate those lecturers sacked for striking, although the government says it has advised them to do so.

A recent article by the News Agency of Nigeria makes it clear that the government’s intention in setting up the new fund is to break the lecturers’ strike, which has affected most Nigerian universities since the beginning of the year.



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