Strikes erupt over public worker pay cut in Romania

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The following letter was sent to the WSWS from a correspondent in Romania.

A spontaneous strike by employees of the finance ministry that began yesterday morning (Wednesday 13 October) has turned into a major crisis for the government. The conflict erupted over the elimination of bonus payments in the public sector, which for most civil servants has meant a check of about 100-150 euros a month. Hundreds of employees occupied the ministry building throughout the night with the finance minister barricading himself in his office before being escorted to a vehicle by special security officers.

Today civil servants from local authorities and government agencies throughout the country went out to protest. Teachers who finished classes went to picket the education ministry in solidarity with finance ministry workers.

When the finance minister returned to negotiate, protesters and local union members were barred from the discussions. Only the union bosses were allowed in. After concluding the negotiations, union leaders announced that the bonuses will be granted, in the near future, but not before a commission, including officials and unions, calculates the value of the bonuses, to “prevent abuses”.

What was astonishing was the arrogant and defiant tone and posture of the union leaders, who simply announced the deal and refused the demand to have the bill signed today. The government reaction was to threaten the workers that if they do not accept what the unions have announced they will be sanctioned for an illegal strike.

A few hours ago the education minister fled the ministerial building surrounded by gendarmes. It is unclear at the moment what will happen but the attitude of the union leaders shows that they will attempt to dissolve the protests, by dividing and intimidating people to return home.

A few weeks ago the union leaders complained that people do not want to participate in the protest actions that they organized. It is now clear that this is a hoax. They would drive workers from the country hundreds of kilometers by bus, would reach the capital in the morning and would send them back at noon because “people were tired”. Local union branches in Bucharest did not announce the protests, and there were reports in the media of people who were actually told the protest was canceled. The general mood has changed considerably however, and people in all areas of work are talking very acutely about economic issues.

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