

Romania: Nokia trade unions in the pocket of management

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20 October 2011

Two weeks after the decision by the Finnish company Nokia to close its plant in Jucu, Romania, more and more information has come to light showing the collaboration between the trade union and the company in carrying out the closure.

Last week the newspaper *Evenimentul zilei* (EVZ) published a revealing report on the contract agreed between the trade union and the Nokia management in Romania. The most shocking information was that the contract does not mention anything about the provision for redundancy payments for workers. While the rights of workers are ignored, the contract provides considerable favors for the union leaders.

Officials in government agencies dealing with safety say that Nokia Romania notified ITM Cluj earlier this year that it would not join the national contract for services and electronics, which sets workers' salaries. As a consequence, Nokia is under no legal obligation to provide severance payments.

The union accepted this even though the closure was predictable. According to the major newspapers this decision was anticipated by some analysts as early as spring, when the company closed its research center in Cluj and fired 120 programmers.

While workers are denied their rights, a special "chapter" has been inserted into the Nokia employment contract for the trade union bureaucrats. Article 31 says: "The elected union representative at the Nokia Romania SRL will receive monthly reduced working hours which will not affect the monthly pay." Under this provision, Cristian Copil, the union leader from Nokia, received five days off every month, and the union vice-presidents at Nokia, three days off, with full pay compensation. The union president at Nokia received 15 free days per year (the equivalent of ten shifts, each 12 hours) and the vice-presidents the

equivalent of three free shifts. Ostensibly, this time was allocated to "union training".

Workers at the factory receive an average wage of less than €200 per month. Cristian Copil received a salary four times as high—a monthly salary of 3,400 lei (around €800) and was expected to work fewer hours.

Nokia Metal union leader, Valentin Ilca?, whose signature appears on the contract agreement, admits that the document recorded at ITM Cluj does not provide severance payments for the workers. Ilca? claims that he agreed that workers should not receive severance payments because Nokia has a universal social assistance program that applies wherever needed.

Another union leader, Stefan Roman, from the Sanitas union, told EVZ that he had never heard of a contract agreement which did not include the right for severance pay for workers. The Sanitas leader has argued that the document signed by the union leaders with Nokia violates existing law.

When the media published first details about the situation at Nokia, at least 400 employees from the factory organized a spontaneous strike on Tuesday last week. The local newspaper *Ziua de Cluj* said that workers employed for a specific period through recruitment firms such as Lugera & Makler and Trenkwalder SOBIS, protested after finding out they would only work until November 1 instead of December 1, as officially announced. A total of 800 employees are affected by this decision.

The Social Democrat Party (PSD) has sought to exploit this situation and present itself as a party willing to fight for workers' rights. It organized a protest in Jucu on October 3. According to another local newspaper, *Stiri de Cluj*, the Nokia factory workers were threatened that morning with the sack if they participated in the protest. "We were told that whoever

wants to participate in the protest organized by PSD in Jucu can go, but risked being fired prematurely,” said an employee who wanted to remain anonymous.

The Nokia management also takes advantage of the situation in Jucu, a small village where most people are employed at Nokia. Workers were told during the same early morning meeting that if production is maintained at the current level they will receive an extra month’s pay in November as a bonus. “It was like a reward. If we do not protest, we get extra money in November. ... I do not think one of them went to the protest in Jucu,” said the worker.

The opening up of the Nokia plant just three years ago was widely declared to be the beginning of a new epoch of employment and prosperity for people in the region. Now its closure will only leave behind unemployment, social misery and frustration. It is a clear and eloquent expression of the bankruptcy and failure of the capitalist economic policies designed and implemented in Romania after December 1989.

Among the most recent measures implemented by the rapacious Romanian ruling elite is the new labor code passed earlier this year. The law severely restricts workers’ rights, simplifies the procedures for collective redundancies but increases the privileges and freedoms of large corporations. Such corporations, as Nokia proves, are quite prepared to buy off the trade union bureaucrats in order to further their own interests.



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