

Workers struggles around the world

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Asia-Pacific

Unions call off Korean subway strike

Union leaders called off a strike by South Korean subway workers only hours after it began. The workers in Seoul went on strike one week ago when management refused to negotiate their demands for a 7.8 percent pay increase and instead demanded that wages be cut by 4 percent.

Shortly after the strike began at 5am, union leaders immediately resumed negotiations and then ordered a return to work, announcing they had reached an agreement.

The management promised to 'raise wages gradually' and to reinstate seven workers sacked earlier for organising a wildcat strike. Union leaders accepted the deal despite the fact that management had mobilised and used scab labour during the stoppage.

'Dismissals for management reasons,' the rule used to fire the seven workers, is part of the agreement struck in February by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions with the government now headed by Kim Dae Jung. It has already been used extensively by companies to lay off thousands of workers.

Job brokers prey on Thai workers

Urban and rural workers in Thailand, desperate for work because of the economic crisis, are falling victim to ruthless 'job brokers' who are stripping them of their meagre savings and, in many cases, selling them into bonded labour.

In one recent case, three women villagers paid a broker 50,000 baht and were promised well-paid jobs in Malaysia. Instead they ended up working in slave labour conditions and were unable to return home because the broker had kept their passports.

Another 11 workers were swindled out of almost 1 million baht by a Bangkok job broker. The men had

been promised jobs in the United States. After handing over the money they never heard from the broker again.

In another instance nine villagers from Pob Phra who had been sent by a job agency to work in Singapore without permits are now facing severe penalties.

Japan air strike called off

A strike by All Nippon Airways flight crews was called off last week when management agreed to reverse a pay cut implemented in March 1997.

However, no settlement has been reached on the major issues that sparked strike action, including the introduction of a salary restructuring scheme for pilots and flight engineers. Imposed on April 1, the scheme replaces base salaries with a performance-based pay system. An ANA crew association spokesman said the union was continuing discussions but did not rule out further strike action.

Philippines Airlines threatens more jobs

Philippines Airlines ground and cabin crews have threatened to join striking pilots if the management goes ahead with plans to downsize the workforce.

The staff cuts are in line with a proposed restructuring to cut international routes and concentrate on domestic services. A spokesman for the PAL Employees Union, representing the 8,400 workers, told the media this week: 'If our members are going to be affected, we have no choice but to join our pilots on the picket line.'

However, the union has not called a stopwork meeting to discuss the threat to jobs, nor has it taken any action in support of the pilots. Support has been restricted to off-duty cabin crews attending the picket lines.

Philippines Airlines sacked all its 600 pilots when they went on strike on June 6 and ignored a management deadline to return to work. The strike is against a new policy compelling pilots to retire after 20 years service or 20,000 flying hours. The policy is a mechanism to slash manning levels.

Europe

Greek bank union prepares sellout

Workers at the Ionian Bank, the fourth-largest bank in Greece, were this week continuing their five week-long strike, in defiance of three orders by an Athens Court declaring the strike illegal.

The workers first went on strike on May 8 in opposition to the decision of the social democratic government of Prime Minister Costas Simitis to privatise the bank. The bank sale is part of moves to slash the public sector to comply with criteria for entry into the European Monetary Union by 2001.

However, union federations have called off all support for the dispute and the bank workers union is moving towards a deal with the government to ensure that the privatisation goes ahead. Under the agreement, the workers would supposedly keep their jobs and social security benefits within the privatised enterprise.

The agreement will strengthen the government's hand to sell-off other assets. These include the state-owned Duty Free Shops, the Bank of Crete, the government's stake in the Public Petroleum Corporation and its share in the phone company OTE.



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