

Workers Struggles Around the World: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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Oil mergers hit Thai jobs

Hundreds of jobs will be destroyed in the oil industry in Thailand following the \$US77.2 billion global merger between Mobil Oil and Exxon. The Thai operations will shed labour as part of a worldwide restructuring plan aimed at cutting costs and capturing a greater market share.

Even before the merger the two companies held a dominant position in Thailand. Esso operated a refinery producing 145,000 barrels a day, 800 service stations and 10 petroleum depots. Mobil has 80 petrol stations and a lubricant blending plant producing 400,000 barrels a year. Together the companies employ 1,750 workers.

The lack of any social security scheme in Thailand means that sacked oil workers will join tens of thousands of other unemployed facing great hardships.

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Chinese coal mines to close

The Chinese central government has announced plans to close down many of the country's 25,800 small

mining operations slashing national output by 250 million tonnes a year and eliminating about a million jobs. In Shanxi province alone, the country's major coal producing region, 2,900 'illegal' mining operations will be shut over the next 12 months. A government spokesman stated that there was an over supply of coal and that the closures were necessary to stem losses in the industry.

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Hong Kong explosion injures workers

Two workers were seriously injured in Hong Kong this week when a truck carrying 24 tonnes of foam waste exploded sending up clouds of black smoke. The explosion occurred at a waste inspection centre when a sample suddenly ignited as it was being tested by an inspector. The inspector and his assistant were both badly burnt and the truck driver received minor injuries. Firemen took over two hours to bring the fire under control.

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Samsung and Daewoo workers oppose downsizing

Over 2,500 workers employed by Samsung Motors and Daewoo Electronic (DEC) held three-day protests rallies outside the head offices of both companies last week. The workers were opposing the absorption of Samsung Motors by DEC, claiming the plan will lead to 6,200 layoffs. Another 600 workers employed by the Samsung Motors marketing department are staging an indefinite sit-in strike.

At the same time, riot police clashed with workers and students at a 3,000 strong rally in central Seoul called by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions to protest continuing lay-offs. The police formed barricades and attacked the protesters when they attempted to leave a park to march two blocks to a nearby Catholic cathedral.

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Protest by Indonesian pedicab drivers

Nearly 500 pedicab drivers converged on the city hall in Tangerang, West Java, on Wednesday morning smashing windows and damaging cars parked outside the building. The protest erupted when the head of the town council's Security and Order Services announced over a loud speaker that the drivers were prohibited from operating their vehicles on the city's main streets.

Before going to city hall the drivers first marched on the town's House of Regional Representatives but were blocked by security forces. The drivers are angry because the ban excludes them from areas containing many office buildings and shopping centres. More than 5,000 pedicabs currently operate in the city centre.

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Firesale of state enterprises planned in Thailand

The Thai Government has recently announced plans to privatise up to 60 state enterprises as part of the guidelines dictated by the IMF. The huge firesale will include 26 provincial airports and cargo handling enterprises, the Ports Authority, power, water and telecommunications utilities, publicly owned expressways and a 50 percent share in Thai Airways.

The proceeds from selling off Thailand's major airports alone are expected to be \$US1billion. According to the unions, the sale of state enterprises will result in thousands of workers being thrown out of work.

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Nurses lose overtime entitlements

Tasmanian nurses have accused the state government of cutting their overtime entitlements at the Royal Hobart Hospital to reduce the hospital's operating costs. Under new work arrangements, the nurses will not be paid for working overtime if they take more than five days sick leave each year not authorised by a medical certificate.

The nurses claim the cut to entitlements is an attempt to offset a pay rise granted earlier this year. Last year the amount of overtime worked by nurses increased by 5 percent. The hospital authorities have also cut back on services, including elective surgery.

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Social Security workers oppose job cuts

Government social security workers employed at Centrelink offices in South Australia and Canberra last week endorsed a series of proposals to oppose the

federal government's plan to axe 5,000 jobs from the service nationally.

Union members in Canberra carried out a half-day strike last Tuesday. A spokesman for the Community and Public Services Union estimated that up to 900 jobs will go in Canberra under the government's plans.

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Airline unions agree to job cuts

After months of closed door negotiations, the Transport Workers Union, covering nearly 15,000 workers at Ansett Australia, one of Australia's major airlines, signed a deal that will allow the destruction of hundreds of jobs and the elimination of working conditions.

Under the agreement, the company will outsource many its non-core activities, including its catering and freight sections, at the cost of 1,700 jobs. The company also plans to sell off its regional and country carrier.

A company spokesman said the deal will enable Ansett to cut labour costs by over \$135 million. In exchange the company agreed to a 9 percent pay increase spread over three years. Other unions covering workers at Ansett, including the Public Services Union, are expected endorse similar agreements by next week.

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Australian insurer to axe jobs

National Mutual Holdings, a major Australian insurance company, announced this week that it is considering axing 1,200 jobs from its workforce of 4,000 in order to cut costs by \$150 million a year. The announcement was made following a report that showed a 32 percent drop in the company's profits this year to \$205 million.

The job cuts are part of a global restructure being carried out by the French insurance giant AXU-UAP which holds a 51 percent stake in the Australian insurer.



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