

# Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

## Global downsizing at Heinz

20 February 1999

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature by e-mailing information to [editor@wsws.org](mailto:editor@wsws.org)

### **Indonesian workers protest over pay and conditions**

As many as 25,000 workers from four factories owned by PT Maspion, one of Indonesia's largest electronics companies, clashed with police in Surabaya on Wednesday during protests over demands for higher wages and better working conditions.

The workers were marching from their factories to the city centre and attempted to break through barricades established by the police and army troops. The security forces used tear gas, batons, water hoses and warning shots to break up the protest.

A number of workers were injured and five people were arrested. Surabaya police chief Colonel Bambang Satriawan claimed that four of the arrested were students and accused them of provoking the protests. The real causes lie in the collapse of the living standards of workers over the last year as a result of the country's economic crisis.

Maspion workers have been engaged in protests for eight consecutive days. On Tuesday, police and troops fired tear gas and warning shots to break up a demonstration of 4,000 workers inside one of the company's factory compounds. Surabaya in East Java is Indonesia's second largest city with substantial sections of industry.

### **Kia workers hold stopwork protest**

Over 600 workers at a Kia Motors plant in South Korea held a five-hour stoppage last week after protracted negotiations between the union and management broke down. The 12,410 Kia workers launched a campaign on February 5 to win a 9 percent wage increase, job security until the year 2000 and the payment of bonuses owed to them since 1997.

Workers at Hyundai Motors will meet on February 20 to decide if they will organise coordinated strike action alongside the Kia workforce. Hyundai took over the ailing Kia last year and workers in both companies fear that hundreds more jobs will be axed as the operations are restructured.

### **LG Semicon strike ends**

Over 9,000 workers at South Korea's LG Semicon last week ended a 15-day strike against the pending absorption of the company by Hyundai Electronics. The union recommended the acceptance of a deal that includes a redundancy package equal to six months wages and pay incentives tied to increased productivity.

The strike was part of a series of stoppages by workers from some of Korea's major conglomerates, including Samsung Motors and Daewoo Electronics, in opposition to mergers that workers fear will result in massive job losses.

Despite demands by the workers for a seven-year job security agreement, Hyundai has refused to guarantee that it will employ the LG Semicon workforce. The strike cost an estimated 15 billion won (\$12.8 million) a day in lost production.

### **Refinery workers strike over wages and conditions**

Five hundred workers from the Esso oil and gas refinery at Longford, Victoria, went on an indefinite strike last week over a new workplace agreement. Two hundred members of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) walked off the job over a wage demand and 300 members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) went on strike over health and safety issues.

A spokesman for the ETU said that Esso was deliberately stalling on negotiations, hoping to blame strike action for the company's inability to meet a deadline to restore full gas production by winter. Last year gas production at Longford came to a standstill following an explosion that killed two workers.

Other workers employed on Esso's offshore drilling platforms are threatening strike action because a contractor, P & O Catering, imposed compulsory drug, alcohol and DNA testing.

### **Jobs go at Hoover**

Over 200 jobs will go when Hoover closes its whitegoods plant at Clayton, in Victoria, following the decision by its parent company Suncorp to sell its whitegoods divisions to Email.

A spokesman for Email said the company plans to maintain Suncorp's dishwasher and cooking stove plants in Victoria but will cease the production of Hoover refrigerators.

### **Sydney university stoppage**

Staff at the University of Sydney held a two-hour stoppage this week in support of a new work agreement. The workers, members of the Community and Public Sector Union and the National Tertiary Education Union, are incensed by the university's demand for a 30 percent staff cut.

A spokesman for the unions said negotiations spread over 17 meetings had failed to produce a satisfactory outcome. The workers are threatening a one-day strike next month.

### **Arrests on Gordonstone picket**

Police are continuing to arrest workers and supporters picketing the Rio Tinto-owned Gordonstone mine in central Queensland. Last week over 20 pickets were taken into custody as 250 people attempted to stop a bus carrying scabs from entering the mine site. Extra police were brought in from Gladstone, Mackay and Longreach.

The entire 300 strong Gordonstone workforce was sacked by the former mine owner ARCO over 17 months ago. The mine has since been bought by Rio Tinto but the company refused to reinstate the unionised workers. Instead, it signed up a new workforce on individual contracts.

Even though the sacked workers have been subjected to continuous intimidation the union has not called any coordinated industrial action to back the Gordonstone workers. This week national officials of the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union ruled out an earlier threat of a national strike.

### **Global downsizing at Heinz**

Over 10 percent of the 3,000-strong combined workforce at Heinz Watties in Australia and New Zealand are facing the loss of their jobs in a major global restructuring under discussion by the Heinz company.

Heinz is seeking to slash costs worldwide by \$US200 million and has already begun restructuring other parts of its operations. In 1997 it closed 26 plants and sacked 2,500 workers in North America.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**