

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

10 July 1999

Police attack Chinese paper workers

Riot police launched a vicious attack on 2,000 protesting workers in Huainan City in China's eastern Anhui province last week. Eyewitnesses said many workers sustained serious injuries.

The workers, employed by the state-owned Anhui Paper Manufacturing Factory, were conducting a week-long sit-in on the city's main freeway, demanding that local authorities guarantee their livelihood and return money that the workers had been forced to invest in the factory. They seized two senior officials who had been sent to negotiate with them after the mayor and deputy mayor, former directors of the factory, refused to meet with the protesters. Workers had resisted a previous attempt by the mayor to break up the demonstration with 200 police.

Following the latest police attack, more than 5,000 workers, including many from nearby factories, held a protest march through the city's main streets denouncing the violence.

Thousands protest government taxes

Two thousand laid-off workers encircled Linhe, a city in Inner Mongolia, on June 30 in protest over the imposition of new government charges on taxi motorcycle operators. The workers, previously laid off from state-owned enterprises, had been given loans to purchase second-hand motorcycles and become taxi operators. The drivers earn only 1 to 2 yuan (20 to 30 cents) per passenger.

A few weeks ago the city government announced a new tax requiring every taxi motorcycle operator to pay 400 yuan per year and one tenth of the price of a new motorcycle, irrespective of the age of the motorcycle used by the driver. Negotiations between five representatives of the taxi operators and government during the protest failed to resolve the issue. The demonstrators have warned that they will organise further protests unless the issue is settled in their favour.

Indian car workers fight for permanency

Automobile workers threatened strike action against car giant Telco in the north Indian city of Jamshedpur this week. The workers are angry that only 2,000 of the 4,000

temporary workers sacked two years ago have been reinstated.

The temporary workers are demanding that Telco provide permanent employment but the company has dismissed directives from the State Labour Commissioner to discuss the matter with the union. A Telco spokesman said the company was only prepared to provide training for permanent work to "selected workers".

Primary school teachers continue strike

The strike by 250,000 primary school teachers in the central Indian region of Deccan has entered its second week. The teachers went on strike when their demand to the State government for a pay rise fell on deaf ears. The strike action has forced the closure of over 50,000 state-run primary schools.

The Karnataka State Primary Schools Teachers Association said the stopwork would continue until its members' demands were met. General secretary of the union, Ere Gowda said, "there is no question of calling the strike off".

The media has attempted to whip up anti-teacher sentiment, claiming that parents are "unanimously" against the strike and proclaiming that teachers are better off than the Indian soldiers and their families involved in the Kashmir conflict.

The High School Associate Teachers Association, which had previously refused to support colleagues, warned the state government that if the primary teachers were not given their pay increase, then the 250,000-member union would join the strike.

Unions discuss job losses at Dunlop

Trade unions are due to meet with Dunlop India management to discuss job losses. The company announced this week that it would close two tyre-manufacturing plants and axe 3,000 jobs. The plants are situated in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

The company has told the government that it will continue operating the plants if it is given tax cuts, reduced power tariffs and assistance to finance its voluntary redundancy scheme.

Escorts slash workforce following union agreement

In a move to cut costs and increase productivity, Escorts Yamaha Motors in India's Deccan region announced this week that it will slash 200 permanent positions and 420 casual laborers in the coming months.

The company and the unions have negotiated new salary arrangements that will eradicate many previous workers' entitlements.

The cuts to jobs and conditions come in the wake of protracted struggles by Escorts workers last year. In November workers at the Escorts plant in Surajpur struck for over 70 days.

Samsung workers rally in Pusan

About 10,000 Samsung Motors workers and their families and civic group members staged a mass rally in front of the railway station in the southeastern port city of Pusan on Wednesday to protest the government's move to shut the company.

The protesters burned an effigy of Samsung Group chairman Lee Kun Hee and Samsung products before marching through downtown chanting: "We demand an end to the political plot to kill Pusan."

The Samsung Group announced last week that it would put its loss-making Samsung Motors into court receivership. The move is in line with the government's "big deal" restructuring plan that demands that South Korea's major conglomerates swap business units and close non-performing subsidiaries.

A statement endorsed at the rally demanded that the government produce a comprehensive package of measures to stop the closure. However, union leaders did not propose strike action and instead launched a boycott of Samsung products. Civic groups in Pusan initiated a signature-collection campaign, aiming to collect one million signatures by the end of this month. The anti-government protest continued late into the night.

Broadcasting union threatens strike

The National Broadcasting Labor Union in South Korea announced on Wednesday that it would begin an indefinite strike on July 13 to secure the reform of the broadcasting law.

The union is demanding full independence of the broadcasting commission, personnel hearings for the appointment of broadcasting company presidents and executives, and a limitation on stock holdings by commercial broadcasting companies.

Union leaders are also seeking the establishment of a "production commission", with equal representation from labor and management.

Union officials believe that a rally planned for Monday in front of the main transmission station in Yoido will attract about 2,000 union members employed by the KBS, MBC, EBS and CBS broadcasting commissions.

Security guards sacked with no entitlements

More than 140 security guards in New South Wales were left in the lurch this week when Hunter Protective Services was wound up with debts of \$800,000. The security guards are owed more than \$340,000 in severance and holiday pay, redundancy money and back pay.

Some of the guards have been offered work with rival firm SNP but will lose over \$150 a week in wages because the company pays only a flat rate with no penalty rates for public holidays and weekend work.

Teachers ban ministers from classrooms

Teacher delegates attending the New South Wales Teachers Federation annual conference in Sydney this week voted to ban the Labor state premier Bob Carr and Education Minister John Aquilina from visiting classrooms.

The Labor government failed to allocate funds in the state budget to meet teachers' demands for a 7.5 percent pay increase. Federation president Sue Simpson said the ministers were not welcome, "unless they bring salary offers with them".

The conference also endorsed a campaign to block new government programs, including a ban on teachers attending after hours technology courses and school meetings held in recess or in their own time. The union plans to hold membership meetings on July 25 to discuss the campaign.



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