Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

4 September 1999

Textile workers riot in Thailand

Security guards at the Fhu Po Knitting plant in the Mae Moh district, Thailand, savagely attacked a group of Burmese immigrant workers employed by the company. The workers had refused to work through the afternoon shift. One worker, Mee Sha Moo, was badly injured.

Responding to the attack, some 200 workers doing overtime at the plant immediately walked out and began to smash company vehicles and to break factory windows. They were quickly joined by over 600 workers from surrounding factories in a noisy rally outside the plant.

Korean pilots fight to form union

Over 100 pilots employed by Korean Air (KAL) defied the company and government to attend a meeting this week in Seoul, the South Korean capital. The meeting was called to discuss establishing a union to represent all flight crew workers. The pilots endorsed a proposal to take legal action to defeat attempts by KAL management and the Ministry of Labor to block them.

The company claims that the pilots' plan is illegal because under their contractual arrangements they are considered “partly as special policemen charged with protecting people's lives”. Under the present constitution it is unlawful for police officers to belong to a union.

Indian teachers protest pay cuts

School teachers and staff from the Anjuman High School in the Southern Indian region of Deccan, staged a rally this week outside the district's education office to protest the non payment of salaries.

Union leader Sahajanand Dandharagi said his members had not been paid for three months. He said the protest was only a forerunner to further industrial action if the matter was not resolved. At the same time, State Private Primary School Employees Association members in the region have been on strike for 30 days over a pay dispute.

Sri Lankan hospital staff impose bans

Doctors and staff at the district hospital of Anuradhapura, a major city in Sri Lanka's North Central Province, have imposed overtime bans. The bans are part of a campaign to oppose the refusal of the North Central Provincial Council to pay overtime and special allowances, including holiday payments. At the end of last month the workers staged a half-day strike.

The Council tried to justify its decision by claiming it was short of funds. However, a spokesman for the workers said the Council re-directs health funds into other fields. If the Council refuses to reverse its decision the Anuradhapura staff plan to call for a province-wide strike of health sector workers.

Students back teachers

Students in advanced level classes at the Biyagama Udupila School, on the outskirts of Colombo, staged a protest on August 31 in support of two teachers who were suddenly transferred by the education authorities. The protest action forced the closure of classes nearly two hours before the scheduled time. The teachers, who taught the Sinhala language and Economics at the school, were transferred without any consultation, even with the school's principal.

The students are angry at the treatment of the teachers and because the authorities have not made alternative arrangements for teaching the subjects. They have demanded an immediate cancellation of the transfers.

Journalists protest attack on newspaper office

At the end of last month the North Ceylon Journalists' Association (NCJA) organised a satyagraha (peaceful protest) opposite the central bus terminal in Jaffna, in Sri Lanka's northern province.

The journalists were protesting against a recent grenade attack on the Udayan Press Jaffna office. Two grenades were thrown at the premises on the night of August

12, injuring two security guards and damaging

© World Socialist Web Site

several vehicles parked near the building.

According to the NCJA secretary, the attackers are suspected of being part of a military group that was criticised in the newspaper. The journalists are demanding that the authorities take action against those involved.

NSW firefighters re-impose bans

Firefighters in New South Wales have voted to continue a protracted dispute with the state's Labor government over inequalities in their death and disability benefits. At membership meetings held in Newcastle, Wollongong and Sydney this week the firemen voted unanimously to reject the latest offer from the government. Brigade members said the offer fell well short of the equity they were seeking.

The state's 3,200 firemen are currently working under three differing death and disability schemes. While a pre-1985 fund provides full coverage, the other two schemes, introduced later, do not. These cover more than half of the state's firemen.

The new bans will include refusing to do paperwork, administration duties, fire drills, hazardous training sessions, or reset fire alarms. Those firemen not covered under the old scheme are also threatening to call lightning rolling strike action.

Technical college teachers strike

Teachers employed at TAFE (technical) colleges in NSW held a half-day strike this week in protest against the state government's decision to scrap 630 teaching positions. The cuts are part of a restructuring plan that will see over $67 million slashed from TAFE's annual budget.

The teachers say that the cuts will “compromise the quality of public education” and result in fewer courses, increased class sizes and reduced individual assistance to students. The cuts will also sharply increase teacher workloads.

Statewide membership meetings endorsed a resolution for an ongoing campaign, including limited work bans and a strike and protest rally outside the state parliament on September 11.

Delegates vote for industrial campaign

Job delegates from the National Union of Workers (NUW) this week voted for a statewide campaign of industrial action to oppose the federal government's “second wave” industrial legislation, currently before parliament. The new industrial laws are aimed out wiping out what remains of award working conditions and ending the closed union shop.

The Sydney delegates' meeting criticised the lack of action by the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Australia's peak union body, and endorsed a resolution empowering the NUW's state branch committee to instigate any action required “until the Federal government changes its attitude”.

The branch has 30,000 members, with many working in key areas, including food and petrol distribution. A union spokesman said, “the state would be paralysed within two days” if industrial action went ahead.

Seamen fight for jobs

Australian seamen aboard the French-owned vessel Australian Enterprise, docked in Adelaide, South Australia, ended a one-day sit-on last Thursday. The workers were protesting the decision of the owners to sell the vessel and withdraw from South East Asian trade.

The decision cuts across a commitment given to by the company 11 months ago that the crew would be employed for at least another two years.

The seamen agreed to release the vessel after a company spokesman promised that it would go to Fremantle in Western Australia and not be redirected to Malaysia. A union spokesman said this would provide three days for the company and unions to arrive at a “suitable agreement”.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site