

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

18 December 1999

## **Sri Lankan doctors launch indefinite strike**

The Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) in Sri Lanka launched an indefinite strike on December 13 to demand the retention of the current all-island medical officers' service. The Government Dental Surgeons Association has also joined the strike.

The doctors oppose plans by some provincial councils to take over medical services fearing that working conditions and treatment for patients will deteriorate as a result. Other demands include improved working conditions and risk allowances for doctors working in the war-torn Northern and Eastern provinces.

The Peoples Alliance government claims it cannot oppose the councils' aims because to do so would breach the constitution. This assertion was contradicted by the findings of a government committee earlier in the year. The union is demanding that the government issue a gazette notice declaring the medical service will be retained on a national basis.

## **Court injunction against Sri Lankan airport workers**

Workers at the Bandaranayake International Air Port in Colombo called off a work-to-rule campaign they launched on December 10 after the management of Sri Lankan Air Lines (formerly Air Lanka) secured a court injunction restraining further industrial action.

The bans were imposed after more than 3,000 airport ground staff called a snap strike on December 8, grounding several flights. The industrial action erupted after management refused to grant an increase in annual bonuses and an extra month's salary for each employee.

When 600 employees from the Air Lanka Catering Service (ALCS) joined the bonus campaign, management closed the service, imposed a lockout and suspended 99 workers.

## **Technical officers begin sick-note campaign in Sri**

## **Lanka**

About 15,000 technical officers attached to various government departments in Sri Lanka launched an indefinite sick-note campaign on Wednesday in support of four demands, including the removal of salary anomalies. Scores of officers will report in sick on a daily basis. The campaign began with a 2,000 strong picket in front of the Department of State Administration in Colombo. The technical officers have already taken action twice this year on the same issue.

## **Asiana Airlines hit by walkout in South Korea**

Nearly 1,000 ground staff employed by Asiana Airlines at the Kimpo International Airport in South Korea staged a half-day strike on Thursday, after negotiations over a pay increase and improved bonuses broke down.

The workers returned to work at midday when the airline's management agreed to increase wages by 10 percent and to improve its offer on bonuses. The wildcat strike led to the cancellation of three domestic flights and the delay of several international flights.

The crews handle ground operations—including the transfer of passengers, cargo loading and cabin cleaning—for several overseas airlines, including Northwest Airlines and Lufthansa.

## **Filipino garbage men win pay increase**

Workers at Ren Transport Corporation, the biggest garbage collector in Manila, ended their strike action on Monday, only hours after it began, when the company agreed to their demand for a pay increase. The company runs 214 dump trucks and collects garbage in Quezon City, Muntinlupa, Makati and San Juan.

The 2,000 workers walked off the job to demand an increase of 65 pesos a day (\$US1.69). Ren was paying the workers only 140 pesos (\$US3.64)—83 pesos below the minimum wage. The collectors work between 14 to 16 hours a day.

### **Airdox workers strike over sackings**

Workers employed by mining equipment manufacturer Airdox struck for 72 hours this week at its Argenton and Rathmines factories near Newcastle over the sacking of 55 workers and the company's refusal to increase its redundancy offer. Workers at the company's three other plants stopped work in support of the sacked workers.

On Friday, the workers endorsed a union recommendation to return to work, even though the company had not changed its redundancy offer. The management agreed to pay sick leave entitlements, holiday and other leave loading, and said that the retrenched workers would get first preference if the company rehired in the future.

### **Buttercup bakery workers walk out**

More than 1,000 workers employed at Buttercup bakeries in New South Wales held a 48-hour strike this week in support of a 15 percent wage increase without trade-offs. The company has only offered 6 percent and is seeking concessions as part of a new enterprise agreement.

The action brought production at seven Buttercup sites across the state to a standstill, including the plant in Newcastle, where 200 strikers set-up an around-the-clock picket. The dispute is now before the Industrial Relations Commission.

### **Fire brigade union calls off action in New South Wales**

The Fire Brigade Employees' Union called on full-time firefighters in New South Wales this week to end a four-month industrial campaign on the basis of an offer by the state Labour government to set a deadline for negotiations over a new agreement. Firemen will each receive an interim \$700 bonus but have been given little more than promises on their other claims, which include a 12 percent pay increase and the elimination of anomalies in their death and accident entitlements. A majority of the state's 3,000 firefighters voted to accept the deal.

### **New Zealand meatworkers oppose cuts to conditions**

Workers at Alliance Meat Company plants in Lorneville and Makarewa in New Zealand stopped work this week to protest against the introduction of 10-hour shifts—a breach of the existing work contract. In response, the company delaying the opening of the

killing season, a form of lockout, and threatened to replace the workers even though their contract does not expire until next September.

### **Public sector workers threaten strike in Solomon Islands**

The Solomon Islands Public Employees Union threatened to take industrial action next year over the government's refusal to agree to a log of claims including a 12.7 percent increase for public sector workers. The union warned of protracted strikes after learning that the government had made no provision for wage increases in its budget.



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