

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

24 December 1999

Malaysian bank workers to strike

Staff at the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation in Malaysia voted to begin rolling strike action from January 3 if the management does not reinstate 15 workers sacked two months ago for refusing to carry out work tasks outside their normal duties. Over 80 percent of the 1,600 strong workforce voted in favour of the strike, the first in the history of the National Union of Bank Employees.

Since the sackings, staff at the bank's branches across the country have protested by covering up their uniforms with black garbage bags and wearing headbands reading "We Fight for Justice", and badges declaring "British HSBC Bank Exploits Malaysians".

A spokesman for the union said that many of those participating in the protest had been harassed by management and threatened with the retraction of their medical benefits and the deferment of yearly salary increments. The management has attempted to defuse the issue by offering a retirement package to the 15 dismissed workers, but it was rejected.

South Korean union officials police march

Nearly 100,000 members of the Federation of Korean Trade Unions took strike action on December 17. The central demand is for companies to continue to pay the wages of union officials. Some 15,000 workers, mainly from workplaces in the metropolitan area, attended a rally in the Cultural Square in Seoul and later marched through the city.

Union officials stood beside police officers along the route of the march and outside the entrances of government buildings to jointly enforce order. Last month workers battled with riot police who attempted to break up a protest against corporate layoffs.

Korean airline workers votes to strike

Ground staff at Asiana Airlines in South Korea overwhelmingly voted to strike on December 27 after

another breakdown in negotiations over a wage rise. The union has held continuous meetings with the company since September but management has refused to increase its wage offer. The workers are seeking an 11.6 percent rise in basic salaries and an 850 percent increase in the annual bonus. Management has proposed freezing basic salaries and a smaller bonus increase.

Indonesian sugar workers protest

About 300 representatives of workers from five sugar factories in Central Java marched on the provincial council building in Semarang on Wednesday to protest against layoffs at their factories. The protesters are employed by the Colomadu, Ceper, Cepiring, Banjaratma and Kalibagor sugar companies. One representative said that management at the factories had been sacking workers without stating a clear reason and without proper notification.

Victorian glass workers laid off

Eighty-three workers were stood down this week in the course of an ongoing industrial dispute over working conditions at ACI's glass moulding plant at Box Hill in Victoria. The workers learnt that there was no chance of returning to work before Christmas and they and their families now face a bleak holiday period.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union did not mount an industrial challenge against the stand-downs and instead sought an urgent injunction in the Federal Court questioning the legality of ACI's action. The court will not hear the case before Friday morning.

Building delegates place bans on McDonalds in Sydney

Building unions have imposed bans on the construction of a McDonald's restaurant in Sydney's eastern suburbs because of community fears that the building will spoil adjoining parkland. Local residents have been fighting the plan to construct the fast food

outlet at the intersection of Anzac Parade and Lang Road, which borders on scenic Moore Park. Even though the South Sydney Council rejected the McDonald's proposal in 1995 the developers are seeking approval from the Land and Environment Court and are confident the project will get the go ahead.

Fiji nurses place bans

Nurses in Fiji imposed overtime bans this week in the lead-up to a national strike due to begin on January 13. The nurses imposed the ban after the Public Service Commission (PSC) stated it was not prepared to pay an annual increase of \$F2,000 to nurses and \$F1,000 to hospital orderlies. Officials of the Fiji Nurses Association walked out of the current round of negotiations when the PSC refused to budge from its position. Fiji's Secretary for Labour Apisalome Tuidreu intervened in the dispute, ordering the union and PSC officials to hold further talks.

Nurses threaten strike action in Papua New Guinea

Nurses in Papua New Guinea are threatening national strike action over staff shortages and the non-payment of entitlements. Nurses say that the lack of manpower means that they cannot carry out their duties professionally and that the safety and well being of patients is being seriously threatened. They are also demanding increased insurance coverage. The union claims that the insurance increase had not been included in this year's Health Department budget.



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