

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

8 January 2000

Sri Lankan Airlines seek injunction against workers

Sri Lanka Airlines, the national carrier of Sri Lanka, has applied for a court injunction against ground staff at Bandaranaike International Airport in Colombo to halt industrial action begun in December to demand an increased annual bonus. Under the terms of a previous agreement the company is supposed to use 17 percent of its profits to provide bonuses for its workforce, but in 1999 management offered only 8 percent.

Following a protest strike, the ground staff imposed a work-to-rule ban that remains in force. Workers attached to Air Lanka Catering Services Ltd, a subsidiary company, also joined the campaign and were immediately locked out.

The court injunction would prevent ground staff from taking industrial action for up to ten years and bar catering workers from entering company premises. The hearing is due to begin on January 10.

Protests by Indonesian garment workers

About 3,000 workers employed by the PT Rodes garment factory in Semarang, East Java, staged a demonstration outside the provincial legislative council at the end of December to press for higher wages and better allowances.

The workers are currently paid below the minimum monthly wage of 153,000 rupees. They are demanding that the company provide a meal allowance of 1,500 rupees, a transportation allowance of 1,000 rupees, and additional daily payment of 500 rupees to offset inflation. The demonstrators also called for the introduction of a social security program to cover all garment workers who are laid off.

Garment workers were involved in two separate protests earlier this month over sackings and outstanding payments. In one protest, hundreds of workers who had been dismissed from the PT Kong Tai Indonesia factory in Jakarta attacked and damaged the office of the company's lawyer, after the management rejected their

demand for severance pay.

The other incident involved 6,000 workers at the PT ADIS factory in Serang, who smashed the office of the labour union at the plant during a dispute over the payment of the annual bonus. Following the demonstration the management agreed to meet the workers' demands.

South Korean union agrees to privatisation

Unions at the state-run Korea Heavy Industries called off a 50-day campaign of rolling strikes last week after entering into an agreement that will allow the government to privatise the company. The union signed the deal even though the government intends to prosecute three of its key officials.

Union leaders claim that the agreement assures workers of continued employment when the company is sold off and have welcomed a company scheme to provide loans to workers to buy stock options. The union also dropped its earlier demand that the company pay back wages lost by workers during the strike.

Workers sacked in Hong Kong

Wendys, the American-based hamburger chain, closed down all five of its restaurants in Hong Kong on Monday, owing workers over \$HK3 million in unpaid wages. The staff was informed about the closures and the loss of jobs by notices pinned to the front doors of the closed restaurants. The management have agreed to meet with sacked workers and a representative from the Labour Department to discuss outstanding wages and severance pay.

Another 120 workers dismissed from Dendy's bakery on Tuesday are owed \$HK9 million in unpaid wages. A government spokesman warned that other large restaurants might also be preparing lay-offs to avoid paying contributions to a new employee Mandatory Provident Fund that comes into effect later this year.

Transport strike hits Bombay

More than 5,500 taxis drivers and 100,000 auto

rickshaw drivers in Bombay went on strike on January 2 to protest a State Commissioner's decision to enforce a court directive prohibiting vehicles that do not comply with emission standards from entering the city. Over 7,000 private contract buses and 55,000 trucks also joined the strike.

The drivers say that they are not opposed to the Pollution Under Control certificate, but to the arbitrary manner in which penalties were being imposed. The General Secretary of the Bombay Taximen's Union said that the strike would continue unless of the implementation of the court order is postponed.

Fijian teachers to strike over wages

The Fiji Teachers Confederation warned this week that its members would take strike action later this month if demands for improved pay are not met. The teachers are seeking pay increases of between 5 and 10 percent across-the-board and improvements in a range of other work allowances.

A union spokesman said that the government's "delaying tactics" during the current negotiations had frustrated teachers. "If the government fails to meet the union's demands we will hold a membership ballot to decide on a strike," he said.

New Zealand meat workers meet on shift changes

Union delegates from the Alliance Group's meat processing plant in Lorneville in New Zealand met on Friday to consider the latest offer by the company on working conditions.

Meat workers rejected the company's original proposal to operate three production chains on 10-hour, around-the-clock shifts and refused to begin work. The change in shifts from eight-hour rosters arose after the company moved its sheep slaughtering operation from its Makarewa plant to Lornesville.

Meatworkers' Union Otago-Southland branch secretary Gary Davis said after several days of talks last week the company made a new proposal involving a return to four chains operating over five days a week, mostly on eight-hour shifts. Those in boning would work nine-hour shifts. Both would only work five days a week unless stock numbers demanded weekend work.



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