

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

15 April 2000

Indonesian teachers strike over wages

Teachers in Indonesia are threatening national strike action after rejecting the government's latest 15 percent pay offer. The teachers are demanding a wage rise of at least 300 percent and structural allowances in line with the government's planned increases for top civil servants of up to 9,000 percent.

The teachers' dispute has already sparked industrial action and protests. On Monday, teachers walked off the job in Bogor and Sukabumi. Over 3,000 members of the local chapter of the Indonesian Teachers Union (PGRI) marched from Sempur sports field to the Bogor legislative council. More than 1,000 staged a demonstration in Bantul demanding an immediate 100 percent pay increase.

On Tuesday about 200 teachers demonstrated outside the House of Representatives in Jakarta. The protests continued on Wednesday when more than 2,000 teachers rallied outside the Presidential Palace while the cabinet was in session.

A spokesman for the PGRI Jakarta chapter said that the teachers were planning a series of actions over coming weeks, including the boycott of classes. "If these actions are not successful the PGRI Jakarta chapter plans a total strike on May 22."

The central government has called on teachers to abandon their strike plans. It has been backed by the PGRI national leadership who denied the union was behind the stoppages and urged teachers not to abandon their students.

In Bandung in West Java, Vice Governor Dedem Ruchlia announced that he would consider using soldiers as substitute teachers if the strikes go ahead.

Strike closes cigarette plant in Indonesia

Thousands of workers at the giant clove cigarette producer PT Gudang Garam in Kediri went on strike on April 4 over the sacking of two colleagues and demands for higher wages. The company responded by suspending operations for five days and standing down

hundreds of casual workers without pay.

The workers had been staging a series of protest actions since March 30 to press for a pay increase, promotions and for the company to adopt a "transparency policy" to inform employees of its future plans.

A group of workers blocked delivery trucks from leaving the factory compound after hearing that two driver's assistants had been given severance pay and dismissed. Thousands of other workers who were approaching the factory to start the morning's work joined the picketers and began a strike. Over 500 police, including officers from the nearby town of Tulungagung, were deployed in the area in an attempt to intimidate the drivers.

Indonesian workers forced to pay for uniforms

Nearly 700 casual workers employed at the Tangerang office of the City Land Transportation Agency (DLLAJ) in Indonesia are campaigning to overturn a new regulation forcing them to pay for new uniforms costing 120,000 rupiah (\$US17). The low paid workers only earn between 5,000 to 10,000 rupiah a day.

The casuals are employed to collect levies from the drivers of public minivans and city buses. One of the workers said: "How can we afford to buy this new uniform when we have never been properly paid for our services." The workers are planning to stage a protest at the DLLAJ Tangerang office and will file a complaint with the Tangerang Legislative Council.

Filipino hotel and communication workers stage joint pickets

Striking workers from the Manila Hotel and the Philippine Telephone and Telegraph Company (PT&T) picketed the office of the National Labour Relations Commission (NLRC) on Tuesday morning. They were protesting over the decision of the Department of Labour and Employment (DoLE) and the NLRC to declare their strikes illegal.

The Manila Hotel workers say that the DoLE and NLRC decision legitimised the use of police to break up their pickets. The workers have already clashed violently with police and security guards since they went on strike on February 12 and set up a picket to push for better conditions and to oppose harsh management treatment.

The PT&T workers began their strike on April 5 because the company did not honour an agreement that there would be no layoffs following the company's merger with Capwire and Pocketbell. Despite the agreement 38 workers were sacked. The PT&T Progressive Workers Union has also accused DoLE and the NLRC of failing to stop illegal labour practices being implemented by the management.

Workers have been picketing the PT&T headquarters in Makati, and company branch offices in Munoz, Monumento, Caloocan, Taft and Las Pinas.

Indian drivers oppose compulsory vehicle upgrades

Thousands of auto-rickshaw, taxis and chartered bus drivers in New Delhi went on strike on Monday against a Supreme Court order requiring that passenger vehicles over eight-years old be upgraded or be phased out. The strikers blocked busy city intersections by deflating the tires on their vehicles.

A spokesman for the drivers called on the government to intervene and file a review with the Court to allow phased-out vehicles to be brought back into service and to operate for some time to come.

Indian doctors withdraw their labour

Hundreds of junior, senior, resident and intern doctors at two hospitals in New Delhi went on strike this week in support of their demands for improved pay and conditions. They are classed as Category C employees along with drivers, plumbers and technicians but do not receive their entitled payments and allowances.

The doctors were also protesting against the lack of proper residential accommodation and the fact that they are nevertheless forced to pay a House Rent Allowance (HRA). Doctors are not allowed to have visiting family members stay with them.

Ansett Airlines staff strike

Over 500 airline maintenance workers employed by Ansett Airlines in Australia, walked off the job for 24 hours on April 11, disrupting flights in Melbourne,

Sydney, Brisbane and Perth. The strike took place after negotiations over a new enterprise bargaining agreement broke down. The company has agreed to pay a 9 percent pay rise over three years but is demanding productivity increases in return.

Casino workers in Sydney demand wage increase

Members of the hospitality union (LHMWU) employed at the Star City Casino in Sydney voted to strike for 24 hours on Saturday following the breakdown of talks over a new work agreement. Management plans to use non-union staff to operate the casino during the strike.

The union has called for substantially more than the 8.75 percent increase over three years offered by management. Some 3,000 casino staff are covered by the old enterprise agreement and just over 1,200 of these are union members.

Australian rail union threatens strike

The rail union in New South Wales is threatening strike action next month over a proposed new pay agreement that would slash staff numbers and change rosters. A union spokesman said that "unexpected stoppages" could go ahead because the dispute settling procedure that required rail workers to give notice of strikes ran out on April 1. The union is seeking an 8 percent pay increase.

Meanwhile two unions covering rail workers, the Australian Services Union and the Rail Tram and Bus Union, have made a claim for an extra \$300 a week for workers who are on duty throughout the period of the Olympic Games in September this year. The unions are asking State Rail management to confirm the increase before the end of this month.



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