

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

29 July 2000

Sacked Sony workers in Indonesia demand reinstatement

Over 900 workers from PT Sony Electronics, sacked on June 29 after a protracted strike, are demanding the company reinstate them and pay back wages. The strike began in April over wages and conditions at the plant, including the introduction of a new assembly line that requires them to stand during working hours. The workers, mostly women, have agreed to the new assembly line on the condition that they receive more pay, are allowed more than 30 minutes break each shift and are permitted to drink and go to the toilet as required during the working day.

A lawyer for the employees said the decision to sack the workers violated conventions guaranteeing the right to strike during labour disputes. The decision to dismiss the workers was approved by the Wahid government's Central Committee for Labor Disputes.

Philippine transport workers strike protesting government policies

Public transport workers in General Santos City erected barricades throughout the city on Monday as part of their strike action against the Estrada government. The city was brought to a standstill, with nearly three quarters of public transport services affected. The strike was called in opposition to taxes on road use and government laws deregulating the price of oil. The workers also protested against proposed emergency powers eliminating the right to strike in Mindanao and other regions, and called for an end to the government's all-out-war policy in Mindanao.

Philippine farm workers protest against government policies

Farm workers from the Sycip Plantation in Manjuyod held a protest in Dumaguete City on Monday against the "contractualisation" of jobs. Over the last two years, 200,000 farm workers in the Negros Oriental

region have lost their permanent status after plantation owners forced them onto contracts and stripped them of non-wage work benefits.

Papua New Guinea teachers continue their strike

All 10,000 teachers in the Highlands region have ignored calls from their union, the PNG Teachers Association, to wait for the outcome of negotiations with the government, and resigned en masse in support of a 200 percent wage claim. Over 26,000 teachers throughout the country are demanding wage increases from 60 to 200 percent and improved working conditions, in line with recommendations made in a government report, "Teachers Work Value Study, Last in Line".

The National Union of Students at the University of Goroka is supporting the teachers. They have threatened to escalate the dispute by building roadblocks to stop tankers carrying fuel to the Kutubu oil operations and the Porgera gold mine. The PNGTA leadership, in an attempt to stop the industrial action spreading, has told teachers in other provinces that the government had not budgeted for the wage increase this year, but that teachers' pay will double in 2001.

New Zealand academics protest over job losses

University academics seeking to fight a restructuring program at Palmerston North's Massey University are being diverted into a series of ineffective protest actions against impending job losses. The Association of University Staff (AUS) has organised a petition campaign against the proposal to cut 86 positions across Massey's three campuses. The petition, launched three weeks ago, will be presented to the university council next week.

The restructuring at Massey coincides with recently announced staff and course cuts at Victoria University in Wellington, which is some \$11 million in debt. The current staff cutbacks are the most far-reaching in the

history of the country's tertiary education system. Universities lost staff at a faster rate than they lost students last year, leading to the worst student-to-staff ratio in nearly two decades.

The AUS has no intention of fighting to defend the jobs and courses under threat. AUS president Jane Kelsey delivered a keynote speech to the Quality Public Education Coalition conference last week, yet did not mention the job cuts. Instead, she proclaimed that under the Labor-Alliance Government, “the experiment with market-driven education has ended” and those “who campaigned for the restoration of a quality public education system feel more at ease”.

Western Australian workers strike over pay

Around 350 workers at the Port Hedland BHP briquetting plant went on strike on Wednesday, joining workers employed by sub-contractor Transfield Construction who initiated strike action last Friday. Workers struck against Transfield's refusal to meet their demand for a five percent wage rise, as part of a new enterprise bargaining agreement.

Australian oil refinery workers return to work

Some 450 workers striking oil and gas workers at Esso's Longford Oil and Gas refinery in eastern Victoria voted to return to work last Thursday. The workers had been on strike since last Saturday after negotiations on a wage rise and superannuation entitlements broke down. Esso's pay offer of 3.5 percent over three years falls far below the 15 percent they are demanding.

Union leaders persuaded workers to lift bans on crude oil production and return to work after Esso threatened to use substitute staff to maintain production.



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