

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

30 December 2000

Korean communications union ends strike

The leadership of the Korea Telecom Trade Union (KTT) called off a four-day strike on December 21, claiming to have won a victory over the government-owned communications carrier. Workers took action against plans to privatise the company and slash jobs.

The agreement for a return-to-work, however, while making a few concessions to workers on secondary issues, commits the union to oversee the process of privatisation. Its central clause states: "Privatisation will be pursued and implemented only through the formation of a special committee on structural adjustment with equal representation from the union and management."

The agreement allows the company to outsource parts of its operations, such as line repair and maintenance. As well, some 114 information centres will be split off from the company. The deal also provides for jobs to be destroyed through a system of "honorary retirements".

Police attack hotel occupation in Indonesia

On December 26 management at the five-star Shangri-La Hotel in Jakarta called in police to break up a four-day occupation by hundreds of striking hotel workers and their supporters. The workers went on strike and took over the hotel lobby on December 22, after negotiations for improved working conditions broke down. On December 23 the union held talks with the management in an attempt to call off the strike but failed to reach a deal.

The Shangri-La employees are demanding the establishment of a pension fund, an increased allowance for working during holidays and festivals, and an equal distribution among workers of money gained from the hotel service charge. Currently the service charge is distributed on the basis of seniority and job level ensuring that management and supervisors get the lions share.

During the occupation the hotel lobby was crowded with workers sleeping, playing cards, singing and praying. Workers used wooden planks to jam shut the hotel's main

gate and covered it with posters and banners condemning the management.

Even though the occupation was brought to an end, the strike is continuing. The hotel is closed and all of its 668 rooms and 40 suites are empty. The guests have been moved to other hotels and management has been forced to cancel lucrative end-of-year functions.

Laid-off Chinese workers stage protests

Over the past week, laid-off workers in three Chinese cities have staged demonstrations and blocked streets to protest against inadequate redundancy compensation.

On December 26, 2,000 workers from a state-owned heavy machine tool plant in the central city of Wuhan blockaded a major road for three days. The tool factory announced it would sack 3,990 workers from its 12,000 workforce and has refused to honour a previous agreement to pay laid-off workers 800 yuan (\$US96) for each year of service.

On Thursday, 500 workers from a steel factory in the southwestern city of Chongqing blocked roads to protest against the company's failure to complete the payment of redundancy money owed to them. The company was supposed to make a second payment of 10,000 yuan to each of the 2,000 workers who were laid-off three months ago. The protestors marched through the city streets carrying banners that read, "Fight against corruption," "Fight graft" and "We must live".

In the southern city of Zhuhai, 300 sacked retail staff blocked the entrance to their department store to demand payment of entitlements. The workers were dismissed as part of a cost-cutting exercise by the store's new private management. They should have each received an average of 1,800 yuan, but the amount was slashed to only 900 yuan.

Sri Lankan workers strike for union recognition

Over 1,000 workers employed by the Kukulu River Project at Makeliya, in Sri Lanka's Sabaragamuwa province, have been on strike since December 2. The

workers are demanding the reinstatement of a number of their colleagues who were sacked for organising a trade union branch earlier this month.

The management refused to recognise the newly formed branch of the Inter Company Workers Union, an affiliate of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).

As a result of the strike the management has agreed to allow a ballot on January 3 to determine if the majority of workers support the union's establishment. Union members fear that the management may resort to intimidation to pressure workers to vote against unionisation.

Sri Lankan packaging workers fight victimisation

Workers at the closed MSH Packaging Company in Weliweriya, in Sri Lanka's Gamaha district, staged a demonstration in front of the Labour Department in Colombo on December 27 to demand the reopening of the factory and their reinstatement.

After the workers formed a branch of the Inter Company Workers Union in November, the management sacked 10 men. The entire workforce was locked out at the beginning of December after they opposed the victimisation. The company produces cardboard cartons and other forms of packaging.

Union deal undermines fight for lost entitlements in NSW

Striking workers at Steel Tank and Pipe (STP) in Newcastle, New South Wales, have called for Australia-wide industrial action on work sites associated with the company to force the payment of \$3.3 million worth of entitlements owing to the national workforce. These include accrued annual leave, long-service leave and severance pay.

The 150 workers walked out on strike on December 19 for the second time in a month after a union brokered deal guaranteeing the payment of some of the men's entitlements fell through.

The workers previously stopped work on November 10 after being informed that STP had been placed into receivership and that the workforce was actually employed by a series of shelf companies set up by the directors, Brad and Stephen Weeks. The shelf-companies had no assets.

The men returned to work on December 7 and agreed to finish uncompleted contracts after the union assured them that one of the secured creditors had agreed to forgo a claim on \$1.25 million worth of assets. Workers were to receive about 70 percent of their entitlements but the creditor had not signed any agreement and subsequently

refused to do so.

Transport workers sacked without pay

Over 70 employees from Laytons Freight Management, in the Melbourne suburb of Campbellfield established a picket outside the freight depot on December 28 demanding the payment of wages owing to them.

The workers had turned up for work in the morning to find the company had closed its doors and appointed an administrator. The truck drivers and support staff were barred from entering the depot by security guards.

By late afternoon the administrator Simms Lockwood agreed to pay the workers their last week's wages. Laytons Freight Management is part of the Keith Kirkwood group of companies and its closure will affect dozens more jobs in Sydney and Brisbane.

City Rail train guards meet to consider strike

City Rail train guards on the Wollongong to Sydney service in NSW were due to meet on December 29 to consider calling a snap strike. City Rail has altered their rosters and cancelled leave to ensure there are sufficient guards to man services on New Year's Eve.

A spokesman for the Wollongong Guards Committee, Paul Carter, said City Rail was supposed to give guards and drivers at least two weeks notice of any roster changes. He said a number of guards who were rostered off or on leave for the New Year period had already made plans. "City Rail is using emergency legislation for the first time which enables them to force people to come to work," he claimed.

The staff shortage has primarily been caused by guards applying for holidays during the Christmas and New Year period to make up for time off that was cancelled during the Sydney 2000 Olympics and ParaOlympics in September. City Rail attempted to get guards to cancel leave and work through New Year by offering to pay double time and a half, plus a day off in lieu.



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