

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

24 February 2001

## Company thugs bash striking Indonesian hotel worker

Striking hotel workers picketing the five-star Shangri-La hotel in Jakarta were attacked by five management-hired security guards on February 19.

The thugs targeted Muhammad Zulrahman, an active union member. He was dragged a short distance away from the picket, was viciously bashed and sustained injuries to his face, neck and back that required multiple stitches.

Other pickets, who seized one of the security guards, rescued Zulrahman. The assailant was handed over to the local police station, where he was released without charges after a short interrogation.

This is not the first violent attack on the Shangri-La pickets. A number of workers were assaulted by company thugs, only days before. A union spokesman said that the some of the security guards involved in the attacks are also employed as bodyguards for Osbert Lyman, one the hotel's owners.

Throughout the dispute the union leadership has appealed to the government to intervene on behalf of the strikers. However, according to media reports this week, the Jakarta city administration announced that it was prepared to provide special security guards to patrol the hotel if the management decides to recruit strike-breakers.

The 1,400 hotel workers went on strike on December 22 in support of 11 demands, including improved wages and working conditions, and the introduction of a fair system for distributing the service fees charged by the hotel among the employees.

## Workers picket Indonesian bank

Employees picketed the Bank Internasional Indonesia (BII) headquarters in Central Jakarta over two days from February 20 to press for a pay increase.

On the second day the bank union issued a statement calling on all BII employees across the country to end the strike and resume their normal duties, after the bank's management agreed to pay an increase in March backdated to February.

However, according to the statement the amount of the increase is yet to be determined by a joint union-management working group.

## Nurses and student nurses take action in Sri Lanka

Nurses at the Maharagama cancer hospital in Colombo staged a lunch hour protest in front of the facility on February 19 demanding the provision of safety gear and specialised training to handle a dangerous drug used in chemotherapy. Last October, 182 nurses banned the administration of chemotherapy injections until

their safety demands were met and hospital management agreed to pay a 1,000 rupee risk allowance.

Equipment necessary for the safe handling of the cancer drug includes rubber gloves, which must be changed every 20 minutes to avoid chemical penetration, as well as special plastic gowns, goggles and air ventilating masks. None of these are available at the hospital.

A spokesman for the health union said that in most other countries trained oncology nurses conduct chemotherapy treatment. "The nurses who are being forced to treat the patients here are facing a risk," he said. The nurses have demanded that the health minister meets with the union within one week or they will boycott overtime work.

On a separate issue 170 student nurses attached to Ayurvedic (Indigenous Medicine) hospitals demonstrated in front of the Health Ministry in Colombo on February 14 for improved training. Previously all nurses were trained at a government training facility for three years and then a number were sent to Ayurvedic hospitals.

A student nurses' spokesman said: "The Ayurvedic hospitals where we are trained do not have even the basic facilities for training. This will hamper our prospect of being registered as nurses under the present laws as we do not receive the three years required training." Although the authorities had earlier promised to provide proper training they failed to honour the commitment.

## Strike hits Pakistan's largest construction project

A section of workers employed on the construction of the massive Ghazi Barotha water and power project in Peshawar staged a four-day strike from February 15 to 19. On February 15 the strikers held a demonstration in front of the project main office.

Two different companies employ the workers on the project, the Italian-owned GBC and the Chinese company Dong Fong. The Dong Fong workers went on strike demanding improved working conditions in line with those provided by GBC to its workforce. These include increases in food and injury allowances and adequate notice before terminating jobs. The union ended the strike after officials' said the company would "consider the demands".

## Indian university teachers demonstrate for career scheme

Teachers at Delhi University and affiliated colleges demonstrated in front of the university grant commission on February 19 demanding the immediate implementation of a Career Advancement Scheme that the authorities had promised would be

brought in as far back as 1996.

The Federation of Central Universities Teachers' Association, which organised the protest, announced it was planning several other actions, including a march on parliament on February 26.

### **South Australian nurses impose work bans**

South Australian public hospital nurses imposed work bans this week after negotiations over wages and working conditions with the state government broke down. The bans have brought all elective surgery to a halt.

The nurses are demanding a 15 percent pay rise over three years for all nursing grades. The government has offered a 17 percent increase to registered nurses, but offered no rise to enrolled nurses who make up nearly 50 percent of the workforce.

Nurses are also angry that the government's offer made no provision for subsidised post-graduate training and did not include an incentive payment for nurses who transferred from city to regional hospitals. The government has proposed changes to shift work penalty rates that would result in the loss of income. A request for extra nursing staff numbers was at first ignored but the government has now offered to employ 200 more nurses over three years.

Human Services Minister Dean Brown called on the nurses to call off their action "for the safety and comfort of patients". His government has presided over cuts to the health budget which have produced a crisis in the State's public hospital system.

Nurse to patient ratio currently stands at one to every 10 patients, way above what was once considered to be the safe limit of one to four. People seeking treatment are often turned away or sent to a hospital miles from their home. Indicative of the situation is the case of one 87-year-old pensioner seeking treatment who was turned away from three public hospitals. In desperation he went to a private hospital where he incurred a bill of \$1,600.

### **BHP workers walk out on safety issue**

On February 20, 350 contractors walked off the job at BHP's Hot Briquetted Iron plant near Port Headland in Western Australia. The workers claim that work areas have been contaminated by fibertex rockwool particles, a possible human carcinogenic.

The particles were detected being blown around work areas by cooling fans used in the production process. Within an hour the situation had become so bad workers said that the "area looked like a snowfield".

Fibretex rockwool is a synthetic mineral fibre product used for sound dampening and fireproofing. A material safety data sheet provided by the manufacturer suggests that the product is an "irritant" and advises the "use of safe work practices to avoid fibre inhalation". The World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer classifies the product as "Group 2B"—meaning it is possibly carcinogenic to humans.

Following the walkout the management sent labour-hire workers to clean up the dust and particles without informing them of the danger. They were not provided with protective gear despite the manufacturer's recommendation that anyone involved in handling fibertex must wear dust-proof goggles, rubber gloves and respirators.

### **Paint workers locked out in two Australian cities**

Workers employed by leading coating paint manufacturer

Mirotone were locked out on February 22. The company decided to impose a 12-day lockout at its plants in Revesby, NSW and Wacol, Queensland after negotiations for a new enterprise work agreement broke down.

A spokesperson for the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union said the union had been trying to negotiate a new enterprise agreement for the last three months and "was eager to make a deal," but the company had made this impossible because it continually increased its demands. At one point management demanded the end of the 35-hour working week which has been standard in the paint industry since the early 1980s.

The union accused the company of trying to intimidate workers. Management at the Revesby plant had threatened to sack two active union members, one a union delegate, if they did not accept poorly-paid staff jobs.

### **Power workers call for strike action in PNG**

Power workers at Elcom in Papua New Guinea (PNG) voted overwhelmingly last week to strike. They are insisting the company reinstate a group of workers who were sacked after taking part in a three-day campaign of work stoppages in November to oppose the government's privatisation plans. The action caused widespread disruptions to the power supply throughout the country.

The workers are also demanding that Elcom reverse its decision to demote a number of other workers who also took part in the campaign.

On February 20 the PNG Electoral Commission reported that 95 percent of the 602 workers who voted endorsed strike action. Even so, Elcom was able to obtain a court order to prevent the stoppage going ahead. A spokesman for the PNG Energy Workers Association warned that workers had voted to defend their colleagues and if the management did not change its decision on the dismissals and demotions then workers would walk off the job in defiance of the court order.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**