

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

7 April 2001

Striking worker murdered in Indonesia

Over 500 assailants attacked strikers in Jakarta on March 29, murdering one and leaving three others seriously injured. Workers at the car upholstery producer PT Kadera AR Indonesia went on strike and occupied the factory grounds on March 19 demanding a 100 percent wage increase.

The attackers, armed with machetes, swords and homemade bombs, launched their assault in the early hours of the morning. They were eventually driven back from the factory gates with fire hoses, but threw a bomb that killed 21-year old Kimun Effendi, one the 400 workers in the plant at the time. The badly wounded worker died five minutes after arriving at hospital.

A spokesman for the strikers said: "We suspect the attack was conducted by some company workers who oppose the strike, plus hoodlums hired by the management." A number of police were near the plant at the time of the raid but made no attempt to stop it.

Muchtar Pakpahan of the Indonesian Prosperous Labor Union (SBSI) said: "Collusion between business people, security forces, the government bureaucracy and hoodlums has become the trend in putting down strikes."

Defying the intimidation, workers voted last weekend to continue their strike. Conditions and wages at the plant are poor. One worker told the press: "I have been working for the company for nine years, but only receive 374,000 rupiah (US\$37.40) per month and a 4,000 rupiah daily transportation allowance."

As well as the pay increase the strikers are demanding the reinstatement of two suspended men and the granting of permanent status for employees with 18 months service.

Indonesian bus drivers strike for back pay

More than 1,500 employees at the state-owned bus company Perum PPD went on strike on April 4 demanding that the firm pay them last month's salary, as well as outstanding pension and insurance payments.

Carrying banners and placards, the workers demonstrated outside the Ministry of Transportation and Communication in Central Jakarta calling for a meeting with the minister, Agum Gumelar.

The minister admitted that salaries were being paid late, claiming the company was suffering from monthly losses of 2.3 billion rupiah (US\$230,000). Following a meeting with

workers' representatives, Agun announced that he intended "taking stern action against certain company workers for inciting strike action on several occasions over the past few months".

Earlier this week more than 300 workers from the state-owned postal service firm PT Pos Indonesia in Yogyakarta also struck for a pay increase. The workers are only paid between 400,000 rupiah (less than \$US37) and 700,000 rupiah a month.

Chinese workers protest over layoffs and unpaid wages

On April 2, some 500 chemical workers demonstrated in Zibo, a city in Shandong province, demanding that the government reopen their employer, the Zibo Chemical Fertilizer Company. The company was declared bankrupt last year, leaving 1,500 people without jobs.

On the same day teachers at the Guanyin Elementary and Middle School in southwestern Sichuan province went on strike demanding their wages. The teachers have not been paid since early this year.

On March 30, 500 workers from a steel factory near Xian, the capital of Shaanxi province, blocked a major traffic intersection over two days to draw attention to the company's failure to pay them for the past 18 months.

South Korean government continues crackdown on demonstrations

A rally on March 31 by over 5,000 unemployed workers and students, against the austerity economic policies of the South Korean government, was violently attacked by riot police in Seoul. Three protesters were injured and over a dozen more were detained.

The clashes erupted when the police attempted to stop the demonstrators, including Daewoo Motor and Korea Telecom workers, marching to the presidential Blue House. There were also clashes on March 29 between police and Korea Telecom workers who had occupied a branch office in Mok-dong, western Seoul, to protest over being laid off. The occupation was forcibly ended when 600 riot police stormed the building and arrested 198 workers.

This week President Kim Dae-jung renewed his pledge to international investors to suppress opposition to the government's restructuring program. "Layoffs are a painful but inevitable medicine for South Korea's economic woes," he said. Unemployment in South Korea reached 1.7 million in February

this year, 87,000 more than in January.

Sugar mill workers demand back pay in Pakistan

Some 350 workers laid off by the state-owned Dadu Sugar Mill in Sindh, Pakistan, rallied outside the Dadu press club on March 29 to demand that the government reimburse them for lost wages.

The Sindh government closed the mill in 1999 and the workers have not received any pay for the last 30 months. The electricity and gas supply to the workers' housing colony has been disconnected. Union sources claim that workers have died as a result. The government claims it is planning to sell the sugar mill and pay outstanding wages from the proceeds.

Police attack striking hotel workers in Sri Lanka

Armed police attacked striking workers from the Dickwella Hotel in Sri Lanka on March 29 as they picketed the hotel. The workers struck on March 23 after the management suspended both the president and secretary of their newly formed union branch.

One worker said: "The police fired tear gas, baton charged, fired into the air and tore posters from our hands." The violence continued the next day when police raided workers' houses and arrested four people on false charges of assaulting police officers and vehicles. The hotel management has refused to meet union representatives to discuss the sackings.

Union ends three-week long plantation strike in Sri Lanka

Workers at the Invary and Ottery tea estates in Dickoya, Hatton ended a three-week long strike on April 4 after a settlement was reached between unions and the Kelany Valley Plantation Company.

The 480 workers began an indefinite strike on March 14 demanding action against an estate manager who had used his private vehicle to transport tea during a stop work in February.

In a meeting on April 3, presided over by the Labor Commissioner of Hatton, unions agreed to a company proposal that the offending manager be sent on compulsory leave for three weeks.

Australian building workers demand safety audit

Thousands of building workers in southeast Queensland went on strike on April 4, stopping work on 100 major construction sites. The strike was called after a 50-year-old labourer was run over and killed by a cement truck outside a building site in the Brisbane suburb of Aucherflower. The worker was guiding the truck's cement chute when he fell under the wheels. His name has not yet been released.

The workers are demanding a safety audit of all major building sites, including the Princess Alexander Hospital, the Royal Brisbane Hospital, Jupiter's casino at Kirra beach and the Grand Hotel on the Gold Coast. A union spokesman said some sites could remain closed for several days until the audits are complete and safety issues resolved.

Queensland Master Builders Association deputy chief executive Graham Cuthbert condemned the strike as "an over reaction" and slandered building workers for a "go-to-the-pub"

mentality. He declared: "The building sites will be no safer today than they were yesterday."

Ferry workers defend colleague in Sydney

Ferry workers at the New South Wales State Waterways Authority, which operates the new high speed SuperCats on Sydney Harbour, took industrial action to support a ferry master who was suspended after an accident. The incident occurred when a series of waves hit a ferry, smashing a front protective plastic cover and injuring a woman.

Eight peak ferries were cancelled on April 1, after crew members refused to man them. The State Transit Authority applied for a court order directing the Australian Maritime Officers' Union to lift the work bans.

Librarians strike for pay increase in Melbourne

Around 300 librarians from the state library in Melbourne walked off the job for 24 hours on March 29, as part of a campaign for improved wages and working conditions. The workers also struck for one day last month.

The Community and Public Sector Union claims that professional librarians are being paid 15 percent less than their counterparts in other states. The workers are also concerned that management has failed to address other matters, including occupational health and safety issues.

New Zealand factory workers strike against "starvation wages"

The 19-strong workforce at Wellington-based Kiwi Plastic went on strike for 24 hours this week after five months' of fruitless negotiations over a wage increase. A spokesperson for the workers say they are paid "starvation wages" by the company, which supplies plastic shopping bags to major supermarket chains such as Pak 'N Save and New World.

The workers are demanding that their hourly wage be increased to \$NZ9 an hour. Most of the workers are doing 60-hour weeks to boost their meagre wage but are not paid overtime rates. The workers are also asking that basic health and safety standards are written into their work contract. However, the company is offering to pay just \$7.80, 10 cents above the statutory minimum wage, and refused to pay overtime rates. Management has only offered a flat \$10 bonus for working more than 50 hours.

The company's owner-manager appeared in the Porirua District Court this week to answer 14 charges against the firm over health and safety breaches, including not reporting a serious accident. The manager is personally charged with five offences.



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