

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

21 April 2001

Second Indonesian worker dies as a result of thug attack

A second worker has died from injuries sustained during the March 29 attack on striking workers by suspected company-hired thugs at car upholstery producer PT Kadera AR Indonesia (KAI).

The first worker, 21-year-old Kimun Effendi, died within hours of being hit by fragments from a bomb hurled at the strikers. The second worker, Rachmat, who was also wounded in the bomb blast, died on Sunday while receiving medical treatment at the Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital.

The families of the two murdered men issued a statement on Wednesday demanding that the police “immediately arrest the masterminds of the incident”.

Evidence emerged last week that directly implicated the company in the assault. Investigators found that PT Kadera's deputy manager Amrin Gobel made calls on his mobile phone just prior to the attack to leaders of the “Forum of People who Love Indonesia”, an organisation known for its strike breaking activities. A member of the local government and an army officer head the outfit.

A police spokesman said this week that one of the six people arrested in connection with the killings had confessed. He told detectives that that he had organised the assault after being paid 27 million rupiah by another individual who is “suspected to be an army officer”. As yet, no action has been taken against company officials.

Indian aluminum workers continue strike against privatisation

The strike at the Bharath Aluminum Corporation (BALCO) against the government's plans to privatise the Korba Aluminum Plant, one of India's biggest aluminum producers, has now entered its fourth week.

Last week unions declared that the strike would continue indefinitely after the failure of tripartite negotiations with the central government and state government of Chathisgarh, where Korba is located. The talks, which were held last Sunday and Monday in New Delhi, failed to resolve any of the issues. According to media reports, the central government has already accepted payment from Sterlite

Corporation for a majority stake in the plant.

Bangladesh garment workers demand salary arrears

Some 500 workers employed at three Bangladeshi garment factories, Evoke Fashion, Opus Fashion, and Express Fashion, staged a sit-in for six hours on April 15 at the offices of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGME) offices in Dhaka.

The workers were demanding the payment of outstanding wages for March and only agreed to end their action after factory owners agreed to pay the arrears by the next day.

The plants have been closed for three months because of management problems but workers were paid after reporting to the factories each morning. However, payments were stopped at the end of February after the companies announced they were closing permanently.

Disabled workers sit-in for jobs in Japan

A number of disabled workers in the port city of Kobe in Japan began a sit-in at Seiko Kyodo Sagyasho, a soy sauce manufacturer, after being dismissed on Monday. The sacked workers are unlikely to gain alternative employment.

Seiko Kyodo Sagyasho was one of 260 companies established in six large factory complexes built by the municipal authorities in the aftermath of the 1995 Kobe earthquake. Most of these small companies have closed during recent years.

IBM workers protest in Sydney

Shift workers employed at IBM's data processing division in the Sydney suburb of St Leonards walked off the job on April 17 and demonstrated outside the company's headquarters in opposition to job losses.

This is the second time workers have taken industrial action after being they were informed early this month that data processing at St Leonards and IBM's other centre in Melbourne would be outsourced. The management's decision will result in the destruction of 64 jobs.

The company has offered 16 interstate positions to people at the St Leonards centre but most of the workers say it is impossible for them and their families to move. Last week the company told the workers they had two weeks decide if they wanted to relocate or accept redundancy.

A union spokesman said the workers at St Leonards have put forward an alternative proposal to IBM, urging that they be redeployed to the company's head office in Sydney.

Perth bus drivers strike

Bus drivers from three of Perth's four private bus companies attended stop-work meetings on Wednesday to demand improved working conditions.

The stoppage included drivers from Perth Bus, Southern Coast Transit and Path Transit which cover routes in the inner west and southern suburbs. This is the first combined stoppage of drivers since bus services in Perth were privatised in 1996. Drivers from Swan Transit, which operate routes in the east and southeastern suburbs, did not join the stoppage because they are covered by a separate enterprise work agreement.

The strike action was over the refusal of the companies to comply with a recent Industrial Relations Commission order granting an extra 10-minute rest break to drivers on long shifts. The drivers also claim the companies often fail to pay overtime for extended shifts and that there have been ongoing problems with pay since the introduction of a new system.

Poor conditions are forcing many drivers to leave the job. Over the past two years Perth Bus has experienced a driver turnover rate of up to 40 percent a year.

Cleaners locked out in Melbourne

Locked-out cleaners from Axa Australia's new banking arm in Melbourne are continuing protests outside the company's Collins Street premises in the heart of the city.

The workers were locked out three weeks ago after rejecting a company proposal to cut back cleaning staff aimed at saving \$200,000. The company is also reducing the hours allowed for cleaning and has directed its staff to empty their own bins into a central repository.

The number of cleaners has been slashed over the last two years from 30 to 16. Nine cleaners were sacked last month.

New Zealand firefighters vote for strike action

New Zealand firefighters overwhelmingly rejected a pay offer this week aimed at ending their dispute with the Fire Service for improved pay and conditions. In a secret ballot, 94 percent of the country's 1,400 professional firemen voted to reject the proposed contract and 92 percent supported proposals for further industrial action, including strikes.

The near-unanimous rejection of the deal came despite earlier attempts by the Professional Firefighters Union national secretary, Derek Best (a former Labour Party candidate), to sell the Fire Service's offer. Best told workers the offer was "at the limits of what the Fire Service could make, given the parameters set down by the [Labour-Alliance] government".

The Fire Service offered a pay rise of between 6 and 9.5

percent, depending on seniority with a 2 percent rise in the second year of the contract. The increase would be the first received by NZ firefighters in 11 years. The proposed employment contract also contained cuts in conditions, including changes to progression and promotion procedures and a 48 percent increase in the amount of hours in which non-essential work is carried out while on duty.

Union president Mike McEnany admitted this week that there was little support for the offer at firefighters' meetings he had attended throughout the country. "To offer a pay increase that doesn't take account of 11 years and to try to remove a whole lot of conditions, makes it somewhat difficult," he said.

During the last 11 years firefighters have endured wholesale attacks on their jobs and conditions of service. The Fire Service has also employed hundreds of non-professionals at lower pay rates and on inferior contracts to undermine conditions further.

Public servants demand danger money in the Solomon Islands

Over 700 public sector servants in five of the Solomon Islands' nine provinces struck indefinitely this week demanding the government pay them "danger money".

The wage claim is in line with that paid to public servants in the capital, Honiara, who agreed to continue working during the four months of civil war on Guadalcanal that broke out in June last year.

A spokesman for the Solomon Islands Public Employees Union said that the danger allowance should be extended to cover workers in the provinces outside the capital "affected by the war's spill-over".

Workers involved in the strike are from the provinces of Choiseul, Western, Central Islands, Isabel and Malaita. The strike action comes after month-long negotiations between the union and the government failed to resolve the issue. The country's cash-strapped government claims it cannot meet the demand because the country is dangerously close to bankruptcy.



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