# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

**23 June 2001**

**Police attack drivers in South Korea**

On June 19 over 1,900 policemen were mobilised against 350 cement truck operators who had been blockading roads with their vehicles near Seoul's Yeouido Park since May 25. Police smashed the windows of the locked trucks and cars and hauled workers from their vehicles.

The drivers are members of the Korean Construction Transportation Workers' Union, an affiliate of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). They went on strike in early April to demand that cement companies recognise their union.

The police action flows from recent government threats to deal sternly with "illegal" strikes and protests. The KCTU decision to call off national strike action last week strengthened the government's hand and left striking workers, such as the truck operators, vulnerable to attack. This week police also arrested four leaders of the Korean Air Union on charges of leading an illegal strike.

**Four Korean hospitals continue strike**

Nurses and administrative staff at Seoul National University Hospital, Chungbuk National University Hospital, Chonnam National University Hospital and Chonbuk National University Hospital are continuing their seven-day long strike.

The workers are demanding that the management maintain the present pension system in which retirement allowances increase in proportion to the number of years worked. The hospital authorities have decided to repeal the system.

**Japanese pilots' strike hits two airlines**

Two of Japan's major airlines were hit by strikes this week as pilots took action for wages and improved working conditions. On June 20, 685 flightcrew members at Japan Air System (JAS), the country's third largest carrier, walked off the job for 24 hours. The strike grounded 172 aircraft and caused the cancellation of 41 percent of scheduled flights. JAS operates 420 flights a day.

The JAS union is demanding a summer bonus of 1.9 million yen but management is only offering 450,000 yen ($US3,660). An airline official claimed that the company "wasn't yet profitable enough" to meet the full demand.

On the same day 1,302 flightcrew at Japan Airlines (JAL), the country's largest airline, struck for 24 hours demanding improved conditions. The company maintained its scheduled flights by using management pilots to replace the striking workers.

**Cathay Pacific pilots vote for strike action in Hong Kong**

Cathay Pacific pilots voted overwhelmingly on June 20 to strike from July 1 unless management improve working conditions and increase pay. Over 90 percent of the 1,260-strong Hong Kong Aircrew Officers Association (HKAOA) voted for the strike action. The pilots are demanding pay increases of 17 to 32 percent, longer annual and maternity leave and roster system improvements. Negotiations between the HKAOA and the management, mediated by the Hong Kong Labour Department, began on June 21.

Cathay Pacific pilots took industrial action for two weeks in June 1999, resulting in about 1,000 flight cancellations, after management refused to grant concessions to the airline's workforce.

**Pakistani bank employees end weeklong strike**

Employees at the United Bank Ltd (UBL) called off a weeklong strike on June 18 after reaching a settlement for a 40 percent salary increment.

UBL employees began indefinite strike action on June 11, following a daily two-hour pen down (work ban) campaign over several days. According to the UBL Employees Action Committee the strike was the longest ever in the bank's history.

**Sri Lankan sanitary workers end strike**

Sanitary workers at the Jaffna Municipal Council ended a five-day strike on June 19 after authorities agreed to discuss their log of claims and reply by June 28. The workers, who are only paid $2 a day, want a wage increase. Jaffna is the main city in the Tamil-dominated north and east region of Sri Lanka where continuous war has devastated the living standards of workers and their families.

**Doctors at Sri Lanka's children's hospital walk out**

Doctors at the Lady Ridgeway Hospital (LRH) in Colombo, Sri Lanka struck on June 20 over the failure of the health minister to appoint a deputy director for the hospital.

According to the Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) there is only one director for the hospital and this is creating serious administrative difficulties. The GMOA secretary Dr. Anurudha Padeniya said this week: "The post has been vacant since June 1999 and the issue has dragged on for nearly two years." LRH is the only children's hospital in Sri Lanka and treats nearly 4,000 children per day.

**Australian catering workers strike for pay increase**

Members of the Australian Health and Research Employees Association employed by NutritionLink in Sydney walked of the job for 48 hours on June 20 to demand an increase in their pay rate. The workers are paid kitchen hand rates, which do not compensate them for the extra skills and competencies required to work for the company.

NutritionLink, a privately owned food production company, supplies food to many area health services across New South Wales. The strikers are asking for pay parity with workers in other catering operations supplying the NSW health system.

**Melbourne airport security staff continue action**

Security guards employed by Chubb Security to screen luggage at Melbourne's Tullamarine international airport are continuing

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industrial action for a pay rise and a three-year workplace agreement. The industrial action began on June 12 when 20 workers walked off the job, affecting services at Qantas domestic and international terminals.

Chubb Security has hired non-union security staff to replace the striking workers. The dispute has gone to the Industrial Relations Commission where talks between Qantas, Chubb and the union are continuing.

**Nestlé workers locked out in Victoria**

Nestlé locked out 100 workers at its yoghurt factory in the Victorian country town of Echuca on June 20 after negotiations for a new workplace agreement between management and unions reached a deadlock.

The workers, members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, established pickets outside the plant. Nestlé imposed the indefinite lockout after workers rejected the introduction of 12-hour shifts and a new rostering system to boost productivity. Nestlé claim that its lockout is protected under dispute settling provisions.

**Packaging factory staff stop work over safety**

Over 130 workers at Amcor Fibro in Melbourne's western suburbs struck for 24 hours on June 15 after a serious accident crushed a staff member's leg at the packaging plant in Brooklyn. The worker was so badly injured that his leg had to be amputated.

Management, which has consistently refused to address safety concerns at the plant, ordered an immediate return to work following the accident. Infuriated union members walked off the job in protest. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union organiser Bob Yette claimed that the factory had "an appalling safety record".

**Victorian medical scientists strike over lack of staffing**

Medical scientists at Melbourne's Alfred Hospital walked of the job on June 18 claiming that government inaction has resulted in unsafe levels of staffing in pathology, pharmacy and psychology. The Medical Scientists Association, representing hospital staff in pathology and blood testing, has called on the Victorian government to fund another 300 positions within the health system.

The Association's Executive Officer, Rosemary Kelly, said that staff at other hospitals around the state had already voted to impose overtime bans.

**PNG bank workers return to work after three-day strike**

Over 2,000 striking bank workers from the Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation ended a three-day strike on June 20. The workers, who are members of the National Staff Association (NSA), walked off the job on June 15, demanding protection of their entitlements when the bank is privatised. The strike shut down 19 bank branches and 15 agencies.

Workers are concerned that 38 million kina ($US13 million) in entitlements, including superannuation, retrenchment and CPI adjustments owing since January this year, are not protected by existing privatisation legislation.

The management agreed to the unconditional reinstatement of union executive members suspended during the strike, to refrain from victimising union activists, and to accept mediated discussions with the union on June 21.

**Union endorses deal to end New Zealand firefighters' dispute**

The New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU) has accepted a contract offer from the Fire Service Commission (FSC) designed to end the country's longest-running industrial dispute. The deal is the outcome of protracted negotiations after firefighters overwhelmingly rejected an offer in May and voted to continue industrial action.

The new contract, which represents no substantial improvement on the Commission's previous offer, provides for an immediate 9.7 percent pay rise backdated to July 1 last year, followed by a 2 percent pay increase for each of the next two years. While the actual pay increase is higher than the 8 percent increase offered last month, the cost of the package remains at $8 million. Funding for the extra pay was gained by making cuts in other areas of the package, including pay rises for recruits and probationary firefighters.

Adjustments have also been made to a Fire Service Commission proposal to increase the amount of hours spent on non-operational routine tasks. According to the agreement, a new system of extra duties will be tested over the coming year.

**NZ port workers strike for new work contract**

About 250 members of the Waterfront Workers Union at the Port of Auckland walked off the job for 24 hours on June 21 after negotiations for a new work agreement broke down. The strike action caused 36 ships to be delayed or diverted.

The previous agreement expired at Christmas and the union lodged a new claim in mid-February. The workers are seeking a 5.5 per cent pay rise but the company has offered only 2 percent, plus a profit share scheme.

The workers are also opposed to management plans to boost the number of casual labourers. Casuals work for $12.50 an hour—about $11 an hour less than a full-time stevedore. The union is planning a two-day strike next week and has given notice of another week-long strike.

**NZ newspaper workers strike**

Day staff at the *Press* in Christchurch walked off the job on June 21, the second time in two days. The 75 editorial and production workers went out over the refusal of the company, the Rupert Murdoch-controlled INL, to negotiate a national contract with common conditions.

The action at the *Press* is part of a campaign involving staff at all INL daily newspapers and suburban newspapers in Auckland. To date the company has refused to discuss the workers' claims. The union has complained that this is in breach of the Employment Relations Act and the matter will go be heard by Employment Relations Authority in Wellington on July 3 and 4.

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