

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

18 August 2001

Indonesia teachers strike over unpaid salary increase

Thousands of kindergarten, primary and secondary school teachers in Indonesia's Minahasa regency, in North Sulawesi, went on strike for two days on August 10 over an unpaid salary increase granted in January. Teachers in Manado, Bitung and Bolaang Mangondow have already received the increase.

The teachers are also demanding that responsibility for salary payments be taken from the local administration and returned to the central government. Decky Mamalu, a high school teacher, said: "We don't intend to neglect our pupils but we simply have to meet out daily needs and assert our rights."

The teachers said they would continue to take industrial action until the local administration paid the increase. The Kindergarten, Elementary and High School Principals of Minahasa Consultative Body organised the strike.

East Jakarta college staff fight suspensions

About 50 lecturers and staff at the Tarakanita Secretarial College in East Jakarta, Indonesia demonstrated outside the Legal Aid Foundation last week in protest over their suspension by college management for taking part in an earlier demonstration for better pay. The dispute has been going on for a year.

According to one college lecturer staff members were paid less than the provincial minimum monthly wage of 426,250 rupiah (\$US37.51). Management has refused to discuss the pay issue and demanded that staff continue to work under the present conditions or resign.

Chinese workers sit-in over privatisation compensation

Beijing Measuring and Cutting Tools factory workers staged a sit-in at the state-owned plant on Tuesday to demand compensation if the company is privatised. Workers have accused government officials involved in privatisation of the western Beijing factory of corruption.

Workers hung banners on the factory gate declaring: "Sell your houses and limousines and give the workers means to live" and "150 million yuan in state assets—where has it gone?" (150 million yuan is about \$US18 million.) About 250 workers denounced the chairman of their union as a "collaborator" for participating in closed-door discussions with factory officials. One worker said: "No one represents our interests. The labour union is in the hands of the management."

Disputes in China over factory closures and sell-offs have

dramatically increased over the last few years with Labour ministry figures recording more than 120,000 disputes in 1999.

Retrenched cement workers in Pakistan stage protest

On August 11, 50 workers retrenched from the Zeal Park Cement Factory in Hyderabad, Pakistan marched to the Hyderabad Press Club, where they staged a sit-in. The workers were protesting over the non-payment of compensation, provident fund dues and the disconnection of the power supply to their homes after they were sacked one and a half months ago. The protest action was organised by the Zeal Pak Labour Protection Committee. This week the chairman of the committee condemned the workers' union for having betrayed them.

Pakistan public sector workers demand salary increase

Hundreds of public sector job delegates rallied in Lahore on August 14 to demand an immediate salary increase to compensate for recent price hikes. Government policies dictated by the International Monetary Fund have pushed up the price of essential goods and services in recent months.

Those attending included representatives from the Pakistan Federation of Trade Unions, Railway Workers Union, Pakistan Wadpa Hydro Electric Central Labour Union, All Pakistan Workers Union and the National Bank of Pakistan Employees Union.

Sri Lankan ceramic factory sacks entire workforce

Royal Ceramic, a tile factory in Eheliyagoda in Sri Lanka's Ratnapura district, shut down its operations and sacked its entire workforce on August 10. Management closed the plant a few days after workers began one-hour rolling stoppages for a pay increase.

Workers were demanding a 3,500-rupee (\$US30) monthly salary rise to meet cost of living increases. One worker said: "Even though they refused our demand saying that it is unaffordable, the profits of the company have been increased several fold."

Sydney telecom workers strike over entitlements

Sollectron workers in Sydney struck for 48 hours this week to demand entitlement guarantees in a new enterprise work agreement if the company goes bankrupt. The 250 workers, who manufacture telephone exchanges and computer components voted on August 14 to end their strike action after the company agreed to negotiate on the issue.

While the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) has demanded the company introduce a pay-roll levy and place the proceeds into Manusafe, a union-backed trust fund, to cover entitlements, it has said it is prepared to accept an alternate trust fund, bank guarantee or an insurance bond.

Metal unions are demanding that companies pay Manusafe levies at 600 enterprise agreements coming up for negotiation before the end of this year. Workers at MainTrain in Sydney have been on strike for six weeks over the Manusafe issue.

Disability carers walk in pay dispute

Some 250 disability carers walked off the job this week affecting disability services throughout Melbourne's northern suburbs. The workers want a wage increase and improved resources and training as part of a new enterprise work agreement.

Negotiations between the government and the Health and Community Services Union have dragged on for almost ten weeks. According to the union, working conditions for carers were cut by the previous state Liberal government and continue to decline under the new Labor administration. A union spokesman said rolling stoppages are set to continue throughout the Melbourne region.

Melbourne security guards accept lower pay offer

Security guards employed by Group Four Security at Ansett Airlines Melbourne terminal ended a six-month long dispute this week after accepting a 20 percent pay rise over three years. The guards originally wanted a 30 percent increase over three years.

Security guards at other terminals have yet to accept the new agreement. Chubb security guards at Qantas domestic and international terminals in Melbourne are expected to endorse a similar agreement within the next two weeks.

Perth health workers reject pay offer

About 1,100 health workers from Perth's public hospitals in Western Australia attended a stop-work meeting on Wednesday this week to discuss a campaign for a 15 percent pay increase over two years. The workers called on the union to reject the state Labor government's 9 percent over three years pay offer.

A physiotherapist from Royal Perth rehabilitation hospital called the government's offer "lousy" and said that the 9 percent offer represented a 3 percent pay cuts. A radiographer said working conditions in the state's hospitals were unsafe and told the meeting: "I worked from 7.30am to 3.30 p.m. yesterday, then I was on call last night and then I started work again this morning."

Health workers have maintained bans, including non-processing of financial transactions, for several weeks. Many workers, however, are not satisfied with other union bans, which they say are ineffective.

Australian nurses impose bans

Nurses at Wollongong and Shell Harbour Hospitals on the NSW South Coast imposed indefinite work bans early this week as part of a state-wide campaign for wage increases and

improved working conditions. Nurses banned all non-nursing duties and voted unanimously to hold a two-hour stop work rally later this month outside Wollongong Hospital.

According to the NSW Nurses Association, there is a shortage of 1,600 nurses across the state. A spokesperson for the nurses said, "we're not couriers, so we won't be collecting from the pharmacy or going to the central sterilising department to pick up things that should have been delivered, all this stuff is keeping us away from our patients".

New Zealand health workers step up action

Health workers attending stop-work meetings in New Zealand's Canterbury region this week called for comprehensive industrial action to push for a wage increase. Last week, four unions representing 1,200 workers in mental health, oral health and the older persons divisions of the Canterbury District Health Board (CDHB) served 14 days notice of low-level industrial action, including overtime bans and refusal to allow staff to be transferred out of their normal work locations.

The health workers are demanding a general wage increase of 6.5 percent but an initial offer from the CDHP would have resulted in a pay cut of between \$5,000 and \$7,000 for some nurses. The Health Board's budget provides for a \$20 million deficit and is based on the assumption that the authority will only meet a maximum four percent increase in wage and salary costs. Many of the region's hospitals are already facing staff shortages, with low wages causing recruitment and retention problems.

New Zealand casino workers maintain picket

Protesting workers at Auckland's Sky City Casino are maintaining a weekly picket outside the casino in protest over their employers' stand in a pay dispute. The picket has been manned by up to 300 workers and supporters throughout the past two weeks. The casino workers, who have never taken industrial action at Sky City, have rejected a 2.5 percent pay offer from the company. They are also protesting management attempts to induce workers onto individual contracts.



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