

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

25 August 2001

Hong Kong pilots step-up industrial action

Pilots at Cathay Pacific in Hong Kong voted overwhelmingly to step up industrial action in their seven-week campaign for improved salaries and conditions. The pilots resolved to escalate their current “go-slow” action to include a one-day lightning strike.

Over 92 percent of the 250 pilots at the meeting, as well as proxies representing another 1,000 pilots, voted in favour of the proposal. As one pilot told the press: “Pretty much everybody is disgusted with the way management has handled the situation.”

Cathay, which has threatened to break any strike, has already sacked 52 pilots and used chartered aircraft from mainland China to maintain services.

Indonesian teachers demand salary back pay

Some 3,000 state elementary, junior and senior high school teachers in the Purbalingga region of Central Java demonstrated outside the local legislature on August 21 to demand payment of a salary increase granted in January this year. Many teachers are owed up to \$US200.

Teachers have rejected a government offer to the pay the amounts in a series of three-monthly installments. One told the media: “We are fed up with promises. We want our money or we will go on strike.”

A senior regional government official claimed it was “impossible” to pay the outstanding amounts all at once because funds from the 2001 budget had already been allocated.

More deaths in Chinese mines

At least eight people died when an iron mine collapsed in Linfen, in China’s northern Shanxi province. Those killed include six workers and two children. The two boys, aged nine and 12, were the son and nephew of a local mine operator holidaying in the area. Their hut sank into the ground as the mine caved in.

In a separate incident, local media reports on August 22 claimed nine people had died and two were missing after a gas explosion in the small Xijiafu coal mine, near Zaozhuang in the eastern province of Shandong. Seven people were reportedly rescued. So far this year, over 3,000 workers have died in mining-related accidents across China.

Bangladeshi jute mill workers strike for pay

Some 33,000 workers at the state-run People Crescent, Daulatpur, Platinum, Star, Aleem and Eastern jute mills in the Khulna district of Bangladesh struck for 72 hours last week. The workers made 12 demands, including the payment of outstanding bonuses and the implementation of pay recommendations recently brought down by the state Wage Commission. Strikers staged sit-ins in front of their respective workplaces.

Casual workers stage strike in Sri Lanka

About 5,000 casual workers being laid-off by state food stores in Trincomalee, eastern Sri Lanka, struck on August 17 to defend their jobs. The government claimed the job cuts were necessary because it lacked sufficient funds to pay the workforce.

Many of the workers have been employed on a casual basis in the state stores for a number of years. They are paid piece rates, earning the equivalent of one US cent for each load they handle.

Sydney nurses walkout over wages and staffing

Up to 1,000 nurses struck at Sydney’s Royal Prince Alfred and Concord hospitals on August 23 for improved wages and staffing levels. The New South Wales Labor government has refused to increase wages, claiming that nurses are locked into a public sector pay agreement that still has three years to run. There are about 1,500 vacant nursing positions across the state.

The nurses voted to continue with work bans until the government meets their demands.

Melbourne pathology workers strike for improved conditions

Workers at Gribbles Pathology in Melbourne walked off the job and picketed the company's Clayton laboratory this week after negotiations for a new enterprise work agreement broke down.

The laboratory staff, who are members of the Medical Scientists Association, are seeking improved pay and working conditions, in line with those paid by other pathology laboratories in the state. The union has lodged a claim for an 11 percent pay increase, but Gribbles has offered only 9.1 percent.

Security guards seek better redundancy package

Security guards employed by Armaguard Melbourne began a series of rolling stoppages this week to demand a better redundancy package.

The security guards believe that Armaguard will implement sackings in the near future because the company has lost major contracts to its competitor, Chubb Security. The action will affect thousands of bank and retail operations in Melbourne's southern and eastern regions.

Victorian disability carers continue industrial action

Over 400 disability carers in Victoria walked off the job this week, continuing the industrial action began several weeks ago for better pay and working conditions. The action affected disability residential facilities throughout northeast and western Victoria, as well as Melbourne's northern suburbs.

The Bracks Labor government is still refusing to consider the carers' claim for an 8 percent pay rise, improved safety conditions, reduced workloads and for minimum standards for training and qualifications.

Radio New Zealand staff strike over conditions

Over 100 staff employed by Radio New Zealand, the country's main state-owned broadcaster, went on strike on August 23 for the second time in just over a week. The strike, involving announcers, journalists and technical support staff, disrupted broadcasting and forced managers to use British Broadcasting Commission news services and fill-in programs.

The workers walked out over the latest management contract offer, which gives only a 4 percent pay rise and would allow work rosters to be altered unilaterally.

New Zealand wood processing workers locked out

Forestry and wood products company Carter Holt

Harvey has issued lockout notices to around 100 workers at its wood processing plant at Rangiora, near Christchurch. The workers walked off the job at midnight on August 16 over a pay increase. The workers want a 3 percent pay rise, but the company is only offering 2.5 percent. While the workers were prepared to return to work on August 18, the company locked them out until the pay negotiations are completed. This is the second strike at the plant in recent weeks.

Carter Holt Harvey workers are also on strike for a 4 percent pay rise at the company's Bestwoods laminating plant in South Auckland. On August 21, police arrested two workers as they picketed to stop trucks leaving the factory with finished products.

Casino workers barred from returning to work

Staff from Auckland's Sky City Casino in New Zealand held a public meeting outside of the Sky Tower in central Auckland on August 22 to protest against being locked out by management.

On August 18, 200 workers employed at the casino staged a notified two-hour strike from 4pm until 6pm over Sky City's refusal to improve a 2.5 percent pay offer and attempts to entice workers onto individual contracts. The strike closed the casino's VIP room and over 40 individual gambling tables.

Security guards barred staff when they attempted to return to work after the stoppage. The workers were individually escorted to their lockers to retrieve personal possessions and then ejected from the premises. Witnesses said at least one person was pushed over by security staff, another wrestled to the ground, and numerous others manhandled.



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