

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

8 September 2001

Indonesian hotel workers attacked by police

Armed police attacked a group of workers outside the Shangri-La Hotel in Jakarta on August 25 to prevent them distributing a leaflet explaining how they had been sacked last December for taking strike action. Workers were beaten and some were injured. Ten police are now permanently stationed in the hotel to assist management break-up future protests.

The Shangri-La dispute began when 1,000 staff struck for improved pay and working conditions. Management responded with the mass sacking of more than 600. In March, the Shangri-La Workers' Union (SPMS) persuaded workers to end the strike, allowing the hotel to resume operations using contract labour.

The sacked workers have continued to campaign for their reinstatement with little or no assistance from higher union bodies. The lack of official support has opened them up to repression by the authorities. When the hotel reopened on March 17, heavily armed police brutally assaulted workers peacefully picketing outside the main entrance. About 20 workers were hospitalised, including a pregnant hotel restaurant worker who miscarried in hospital as a result of the beating.

The hotel management is continuing a lawsuit against nine members and officers of the SPMS in the South Jakarta Civil Court. Shangri-La is demanding millions of dollars compensation for "material and non-material damages" allegedly caused by the dispute.

Workers protest student arrests in Indonesia

Match factory workers in Bandung demonstrated outside the West Java Legislative Council on September 4, demanding the release of six students jailed for assisting 16 workers join the Prosperous Labor Union.

The students were arrested on August 30 and charged with falsifying the signatures of the 16 workers. One of the students, Mamah Sopiah, claimed the company asked them to write down the workers' names and then told the police that students had forged workers' signatures. The other students detained are Riswan, Ridwan, M. Toha, Yana and Ade Sumarna. The six are being held at the Kebon Waru

Penitentiary.

Indonesian teachers continue fight for back pay

Teachers in Indonesia are continuing industrial action to force provincial governments pay billions of rupiah owing on salary increases granted in January this year. On September 6 thousands of teachers boycotted classes in East Java, Southeast Sulawesi and the city of Lampung. The teachers have pledged to stay away from classes until their demands are met.

Members of Indonesian Teachers Dignity Forum (FMGI) in Lampung are campaigning for province-wide strike action. More than 100,000 pamphlets backing the strike call are being distributed to the provinces' 50,000 teachers.

Faced with ongoing industrial action some local administrations have promised to take out commercial loans to pay the teachers. Teachers in the Purbalingga region of Central Java resumed work last week after the regional administrators announced that they planned to borrow from a local development bank to meet teachers' demands.

Chinese workers strike in Special Economic Zone

Thousands of workers from the Buji Hongsheng Toy Factory in Shenzhen, the Chinese special economic zone near Hong Kong, picketed the plant and blockaded access roads over working conditions on August 23, according to local news reports.

Factory employees work over 12 hours a day, six days a week, for less than \$US37 a month. The company does not provide water or meals and tightly monitors their after-work activities.

Workers faced off against armed police for over two hours before being convinced by a reporter to re-enter the factory and take part in negotiations with the management. The company reportedly pledged to improve conditions.

Hong Kong pilots step-up work-to-rule

Cathay Pacific pilots involved in a work-to-rule campaign over the last nine weeks voted to step-up their campaign for improved wages and working conditions this week.

The pilots have begun "phase two" of their campaign by strictly implementing the airlines' "Maximum Safety Strategy". The pilots' union instructed members not to

operate aircraft until all safety issues, no matter how minor, are rectified. Cockpit crew will not proceed with preflight checks until all ground staff and maintenance personnel have left the flight deck. If the check procedure is interrupted for any reason the pilots will begin the process all over again. Cathay Pacific flights are expected to experience delays as a result.

Last week the pilots endorsed a resolution giving the union executive power to call further industrial action, including lightning strikes.

Sri Lankan mental hospital nurses stop work

Angoda Mental Hospital nurses in Colombo stopped work on September 4 to demand the immediate transfer of the hospital's acting director. Nurses said the director had refused to approve a nurses' salary increment, prevented staff from taking their scheduled day off, mishandled the allocation of nursing quarters and misused a hospital vehicle. The nurses took strike action last month on the same issue and are preparing to continue their campaign if the health ministry fails to resolve the problem.

Qantas engineers endorse strike action

More than 2,400 Qantas maintenance staff in Melbourne and Sydney voted to strike on September 12 following a breakdown in negotiations over a new work agreement. This is the first strike for 10 years by engineers at Australia's largest airline.

Workers are demanding improved wages. Qantas has rejected their claim and brought forward demands that the workforce agree to more flexible working hours in exchange for any pay increase.

The Australian Workers Union is attempting to minimise the impact on airline's schedules. Following the strike vote in Melbourne, the union issued a statement saying, "The aim of the strike is not to cause disruption to flights" and "there will only be delays if a plane has mechanical problems".

Australian Coca-Cola workers strike over contract

Some 140 workers at Coca-Cola's Melbourne bottling plant and warehouse walked off the job for 24 hours on September 4, after management applied to the Industrial Relations Commission to scrap an enterprise work agreement at the plant.

Although the company denies it is moving to cut working conditions, workers fear it could lead to the imposition of minimum award standards and the abolition of over-award payments. Management has already indicated it will not abide by the agreement's dispute resolution process that it claims inhibit its ability to discipline workers.

Little improvement in pay offer at GM-Holden

More than 5,000 workers at General Motors-Holden's Adelaide and Port Melbourne plants returned to work on September 3 after a three-day strike for a pay claim.

The strike erupted after workers rejected a company offer of a 15.1 percent pay increase over three years. The union originally lodged a claim for 24 percent wage increase but reduced this to 20 percent. Workers rejected the advice of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) to stay on the job while negotiations proceeded.

The latest offer by the company will provide an immediate 6 percent increase, another 5 percent in a year's time and 4.5 percent in 2003. Even though this is only a small improvement on the previous offer, AMWU South Australian secretary John Camillo claimed, "workers will be extremely satisfied".

New Zealand journalists vote to continue strike

About 100 journalists at the *New Zealand Herald* voted on September 4 to continue a week-long strike over a new work agreement. The journalists walked off the job after the management refused to negotiate on key issues, including a demand that new starters be included in the collective work agreement.

This week, management sent letters to all striking journalists saying it had "largely agreed" with the union's proposal on new employee's conditions.

Journalists say, however, that two issues are still outstanding. They want a 3 percent pay increase, backdated to April, and guarantees that existing staff not currently covered by the collective agreement will have the right to join it.

Board attempts to intimidate New Zealand health workers

The Canterbury District Health Board in New Zealand sent out notices last week to service managers of older persons' health, mental health, and oral health divisions canceling all leave.

The notices, which were in response to threatened strike action by health workers, stated that all study, conference, leave without pay, and special leave—which includes bereavement, sick, and domestic—had been cancelled until further notice, whether or not it had already been approved.

More than 1,000 health workers were due to begin strike action on September 6 over demands for improved wages and conditions. Six days of negotiations have failed to resolve any of the issues in the dispute.



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