

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

20 October 2001

Indian bus workers take indefinite strike action

Some 125,000 employees of the state-owned Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation launched an indefinite strike on October 15. The transport workers have rejected a government offer to “review” wages and are demanding a pay rise. Police arrested over 70 workers at 46 depots after strikers deflated bus tyres to prevent managerial staff putting them into service. The strike has paralysed bus services across the state.

Coca Cola workers in Pakistan protest sackings

Coca Cola workers at Hyderabad in Pakistan protested outside the Hyderabad Press Club on October 14 to oppose the sacking of 24 colleagues. The sackings are an attempt to intimidate the workforce which registered a new union in August to fight the company’s refusal to increase pay. A spokesman for the workers explained: “We formed the new union because the old one was in the pocket of the management”.

Sri Lanka footwear workers picket plant

Some 800 employees of Bata, a footwear manufacturer located in Ratmalana, 15 kilometres south from Colombo, have begun lunch-time pickets of the plant to oppose cuts in working conditions.

The company is moving to cut two to three working days a week, reduce overtime and piece rate allowances, and has also threatened to abolish annual bonuses. Other benefits threatened include a company-funded holiday once every three years, the provision of school stationery for workers’ children and an annual company-paid family function.

Bata is also refusing to sign a new work agreement, which is normally renewed every three years. Management claims it has a stockpile of over one million shoes due to the global economic downturn. The shoe company recently sold one of its Sri Lankan plants and is planning to sell all its retail outlets in Sri

Lanka.

Indonesian aircraft workers strike over victimisation

Thousands of employees at the state-owned aircraft manufacturer PT Dirgantara Indonesia (PTDI) walked off the job and demonstrated in Jakarta on October 16 over the dismissal of the chairman and the secretary of their union, the Employee Communication Forum.

PT DI Managing Director Jusman S. Djamal openly admitted that they had been sacked for union activity. He declared the dismissals were carried out because “the men were responsible for a series of employee demonstrations and strikes” that had disrupted production.

Workers have taken industrial action over the last four months to demand better health allowances and the elimination of “corruption, collusion and nepotism” within the management. They have also called on Ilham Habibie, the son of former president of Indonesia B.J. Habibie, to resign from the board of management.

The workers have voted to strike until the Minister of Manpower and Transmigration meets with their representatives on October 22.

Nestlé workers protest wage freeze in the Philippines

More than 100 employees at the Nestlé Lipa Factory in the Philippines are picketing the plant to oppose company plans to freeze wages. Management has rejected a union claim for a 6,500-peso (\$US125) wage increase over three years and demanded the Nestlé Lipa Factory Workers’ Union accept a one-year “wage moratorium”. The attempt to freeze wages follows sackings at the plant last month. The Nestlé workers have also established an “information caravan” in Lipa City to win public support.

Statewide stoppage by Australian nurses

Up to 24,000 nurses across NSW walked off the job

on October 18 as part of a campaign for a 15 percent wage increase and against the shortage of 1,800 nurses throughout the state. Services at 142 public hospitals were affected as nurses rallied outside the state parliament to press their demands. Nurses in Canberra hospitals also struck for 24 hours.

Hospital workers refuse duties

More than 3,000 auxiliary hospital workers in South Australia are maintaining work bans in a dispute over pay rates and job security. The workers are demanding a boost in permanent jobs and an immediate \$50 pay increase followed by a further \$50 rise at the end of next year. The State Liberal government has only offered \$23 from October 2002, with an additional \$24 increase in October 2003.

The dispute involves workers in the sterilising units, wards, kitchens and food preparation areas in the state's four major hospitals, the Royal Adelaide, Women's and Children's, Queen Elizabeth and Flinders Medical Services, as well as in smaller hospitals statewide.

Refinery workers continue strike over safety

Over 100 maintenance workers at the Mobil's Port Stanvac fuel refinery have been on strike since October 4, after discovering asbestos-type material during a maintenance shutdown.

The company claims that independent tests on the substance have shown no "imminent risk " but have refused to make public the source of the results. It has also refused to allow the United Trades and Labor Council asbestos officer Jack Watkins to test the affected area.

Production at the refinery ceased on September 25, when the routine maintenance shutdown began. While the management had stockpiled enough fuel to cover the shutdown period, the industrial dispute has cast doubts on Mobil's ability to maintain fuel supply. The workers have ignored return-to-work orders issued this week by the Industrial Relations Commission and the Federal Court. Stanvac supplies 90 percent of South Australia's fuel supplies.

Water workers strike over wages

About 300 workers at the Hunter Water Corporation in Newcastle struck for 48 hours on October 12 for a pay increase. Workers have rejected a 7.5 per cent wage increase offer and are demanding the company meet their 8 percent demand in full. They also held a

protest rally outside the Water Corporation head office on October 15.

New Zealand teachers continue industrial campaign

New Zealand secondary teachers began rolling stoppages on October 16. The action, which teachers say will continue until the end of the school year, follows a one-day national strike last week.

The industrial campaign is being conducted to demand pay increases and reduced workloads. Negotiations over a new collective agreement have been in progress with the government for nearly six months but have reached a stalemate. Teachers want a pay rise of \$2,500 each year for the next three years and guaranteed non-teaching time for marking and preparation to be included in the contract. The government has only offered a 2 percent pay rise and is refusing to negotiate on workload controls.



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