

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

3 November 2001

Workers protest restructuring in Japan

Over 12,000 Japanese workers took part in anti-government demonstrations in Tokyo on October 24. About 6,000 workers attended a rally at the Hibiya Amphitheatre to demand the government force banks to make loans to struggling small and medium businesses. Later in the day, some 2,000 workers protested in front of the Finance Ministry and the Financial Services Agency. Up to 5,000 medical services workers also rallied at the amphitheatre over cutbacks to the health system.

On the same day, workers at Japan's largest telecommunications company NTT went on strike against the company's plan to cut 110,000 jobs. Some have begun a three-day sit-in in front of the NTT Group head office.

Philippines textile workers step up campaign

Workers at Gelmart Industries, one of the largest garment exporters in the Philippines, will hold a strike ballot this week and are expected to walk off the job on November 9.

The move toward strike action follows a breakdown in negotiations for a pay rise. Gelmart workers have held lunchtime protests outside the factory since October 8 but the management has refused to agree to their wage demands.

Workers in the garment industry are among the lowest paid in the country because exporters are granted a one-year exemption from wage regulations. Gelmart, which manufactures Mondragon and Jockey undergarments, employs more than 2,000 staff. It claims that its profitability has been slashed by the global economic slowdown. A spokesman for the workers said: "The truth is that Gelmart has expanded its operations over the past few years".

Indian steel workers strike against privatisation

Workers at the Salem Steel Plant in the Indian state of

Tamil Nadu went on strike on November 1 over the government's plans to privatise the company. The strike was timed to coincide with a proposed visit to the plant by a number of potential bidders.

To date the unions have restricted workers' opposition to protest stoppages and futile appeals to the state and national government. After meeting with a union delegation in September, the Tamil Nadu state government promised to oppose any sale and passed a resolution urging the central government to reconsider its plans. The central government, however, has ignored the appeals and its privatisation agenda is proceeding.

Public employees in India plan three-day strike

Members of the State Employees Joint Council of Lucknow, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, have voted for a three-day strike from November 7 in support of an 18-point log of claims. The log includes an improved promotion scheme, the introduction of a five-day week working week and the lowering of the retirement age to 60 years.

Indian college principals prepare strike

Members of the College Principals Association (CPA) at Gujarat University are preparing to strike this week unless the authorities act to fill non-academic vacancies. Despite increasing student enrollments, there are shortages of clerks and other auxiliary staff. The principals claim that, as a result, extra work is being placed on teachers and academics. A spokesman for the CPA said that the situation needed to be addressed "for the benefit of both the staff and the students".

Indian nurses protest policy breach

Nurses at Sassoon hospital in Pune, India held a two-hour demonstration on October 29 to protest against hospital authorities ignoring a 1977 agreement governing promotions and transfers. According to the nurses the transfer of 14 junior nurses to the hospital in July and October ignored merit and seniority.

Australian airport security guards call snap strike

Security guards employed by Security Chubb at Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport called a snap 24-hour strike on October 31 following an industrial court decision denying their wage claim. The guards have been campaigning for a pay increase for over eight months. They are currently paid \$12.31 an hour but want wage parity with luggage handlers who receive \$14.80.

The walkout by the 100 guards left screening points at the Qantas and Virgin Blue terminals unmanned. Although Chubb brought in standby staff, the strike delayed some flights by up to two hours.

National rallies over job losses

About 5,000 workers attended a rally in Melbourne's City Square on November 1 to protest the destruction of jobs and the loss of entitlements. Workers from Ansett and One.Tel were in attendance, as were workers from several textile factories that have collapsed this year.

The rally, organised by the Victorian Trades Hall Council, went ahead despite an attempt by the Australian Industry Group (AIG) to have it declared unlawful. On October 31, the AIG gained an industrial court order directing workers not to take time off work to attend the protest unless they had permission from their employers. Smaller rallies were held in other state capitals.

Union lifts industrial bans

This week the Construction Forestry, Mining and Energy Union lifted long-standing work bans on the Sarina Shire Council in northern Queensland after submitting an alternate enterprise work agreement proposal to the council. The union made the revised offer even though the council had refused to continue negotiations.

The council workers' original demands included a 10 percent pay increase, regular cost of living "safety net" adjustments and new rules on the use of contract and casual labour. The council has only offered an 8 percent pay increase, with a \$40 one-off "safety net" payment.

A union spokesman said: "Until we get an answer from council there won't be any bans and limitations, there won't be any industrial action." The union has not released any details of the revised proposal.

New Zealand university staff begin pay campaign

University of Otago staff began an industrial

campaign on October 31 after the university management failed to increase a pay offer. Stop-work meetings held last week at Otago University campuses in Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin authorised unions to launch action if negotiations failed.

The action has begun with a publicity campaign and staff will protest at the University Council meeting on November 6. If a better pay offer is not made, academics will withhold exam results and demonstrate at the December graduation ceremonies.

A union spokesperson said that the university has considerable "recruitment and retention problems" due to pay rates.

New Zealand health workers to strike

Nurses and health workers at the Canterbury District Health Board (CDHB) will strike on November 12 over pay and working conditions. Notice of the 24-hour strike, which will involve some 3,000 nurses and ancillary staff, was issued this week after the CDHB refused to re-enter negotiations. The workers are seeking a 6 percent pay rise and improvements to leave provisions. The campaign has mainly revolved around working to rule. An earlier strike notice was withdrawn by the nurses' union.

Fiji's public sector unions give notice to strike

The Confederation of Public Sector Unions, which includes teachers' unions, the Public Service Association, the Nurses Association and the Public Employees Union, has given the government a 28-day strike notice. The confederation is demanding a two percent pay rise backdated to January this year.

The unions claim they are entitled to the pay increase under current Industrial Relations Framework Agreement, which allows for a cost of living adjustment if the consumer price index exceeds two percent.



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