Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

1 December 2001

South Korean Hyundai workers strike

Over 38,000 workers at Hyundai Motors' main plant in Ulsan struck for two hours on November 29 in support of an 11 percent pay claim. Workers decided to take industrial action after negotiations for a new contract ended without resolution on November 27.

Hyundai Motors' net profit in the third quarter of the financial year surged by 102 percent to 914 billion won ($711.8 million). The company claims, however, it cannot give a pay increase because it needs to invest 1.5 trillion won in research, development and marketing. The Ulsan plant produces export vehicles for the US market.

Cleaning workers strike in Hong Kong

Over 200 workers at ISS, a contract cleaning company in Hong Kong, have been on strike since November 21 over lay-offs. The company announced it would sack 152 of its 517-strong workforce after it lost a major cleaning contract with the MTR (Mass Transit Railway). The strike action is the first union organised-industrial action by cleaning workers on the island for 20 years.

The Hong Kong Buildings Management & Security Workers General Union is demanding improved severance payments. Meetings between the union and management on November 23 and 26 failed to reach a settlement. Workers occupied the company offices on both occasions to support their claim.

Indonesian civil servants demand back pay

Hundreds of civil servants, including teachers, demonstrated on November 26 and 27 outside the regent's office in Majalengka, Indonesia, to demand the local administration pay a wage increase agreed to in April.

The local government initially promised that the payment would be made quickly but is now claiming it has been held up by the Institute of State Personnel Administration which has to approve the increase. Following the demonstrations local government authorities promised to make the payment within a week.

Indian nurses strike against harassment

Nurses at SRN hospital in Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh staged a sit-in-strike on November 26 to demand the immediate removal of a chief sister tutor accused of sexually harassing her student nurses. Fifty-four students have lodged written complaints against the tutor.

Parents of some student nurses have also made statements about the tutor's conduct. One parent said: "My daughter has persistently complained about the physical and mental harassment at the tutor's hand since her admission 10 months ago." An inquiry into the charges is underway.

Sri Lankan doctors strike over administrative dispute

Doctors at Anuradhapura General Hospital in the north-central province of Sri Lanka went on strike on November 26 to demand the appointment of a deputy provincial health director.

According to the Government Medical Officers Association, the post has been vacant for the past three years, causing substantial administrative problems. A union spokesman said the doctors were planning further industrial action if the issue is not resolved quickly.

Sri Lankan plantation workers launch industrial campaign

Workers at the Sent Coombs tea estate in Sri Lanka went on strike on November 23 in support of a 12-point log of claims, including permanency for casual workers, a special allowance based on annual profits and a permanent on-site medical officer. They are also seeking a 1,200-rupee salary allowance recently granted to government sector workers. The estate is attached to the government-run Tea Research Institute.

The workers also say that there are not enough basic facilities on the estate such as drinking water, lavatories and housing. Some casual workers have worked on the estate for more than 15 years and not been given permanent positions.

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Australian airline workers strike over wage freeze

More than 500 Qantas Australia airline maintenance workers walked off the job on November 29, in opposition to the company plan for an 18-month wage freeze. Maintenance workers at Tullamarine airport in Melbourne have decided to stay out until December 4, while those at Sydney's airport may take further action next week.

A Qantas spokesperson said the airline's schedules would not be disrupted by the industrial action because only members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union were taking part. Workers covered by other engineering unions were told by union officials not to strike. Qantas has about 5,800 maintenance workers.

Mine workers to strike against contract labour

Members of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) at the Pasminco mine in Broken Hill, New South Wales will strike on December 3 against company plans to employ outside contractors to operate dump trucks and loaders.

The company asked the CFMEU this week to allow it to use contractors to operate equipment that was idled when the company cut jobs earlier this year. A union spokesman said he was sure that the workers would not accept Pasminco's plan.

Bike hire workers campaign for permanency and wages

Young workers at the Bell-a-Bike hire company are continuing their campaign for higher pay and job security. Bell-a-Bike employs casuals to maintain a fleet of 2,300 bikes on Rottnest Island, a tourist and recreation spot 20 kilometres from Perth. The workers are demanding to be made permanent, penalty rates for weekend and public holiday work, and given annual leave and holiday pay. Some of the workers have been employed as casuals for three years. They are also demanding an 8 percent increase on the current $11 hourly rate.

A union spokesman said the workers intend to protest outside the company owner's home in the wealthy Perth suburb of Swanbourne until their demands are met.

New Zealand nurses' dispute escalates

More than 3,000 Canterbury District Health Board (CDHB) workers will strike for 48 hours on December 2. The workers struck two weeks ago, but negotiations with the CDHB remain in a stalemate. The health workers are seeking a 6 percent pay increase and 11 percent for general nurses with improvements to leave provisions. The CDHB is only offering a 3 percent increase.

The CDHB, which the largest in the country, claims it cannot improve its offer because of government funding restrictions. Meanwhile, 3,000 nurses and midwives have negotiated a new contract with all South Island boards except Canterbury.

Teachers ban new school qualifications in New Zealand

New Zealand secondary school teachers have voted to ban the implementation of a new school qualifications system, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), while their collective employment agreement remains unsettled.

Teachers were balloted last week on whether to take action on the NCEA. Of the 7,583 teachers that voted, 5,210 voted in favour of the ban. The teachers want a pay increase of over $2,000 each year for the next three years, plus workload controls written into their contract. The Minister of Education Trevor Mallard rejected the claim, saying that the Labour-Alliance government couldn't afford it. Teachers have been running an industrial campaign throughout this term, sending students home on rostered days each week. Regular pickets outside Labour MPs electorate offices are being held until the end of the school year.

Hotel workers demand reinstatement

Workers at the Lautoka Hotel in Fiji went on strike on November 27 to demand the reinstatement of two workers they claim were unjustly sacked. Lautoka director, Charan Jeath Singh, threatened to sack the workforce and close the hotel if employees continued the strike. He then cut off the telephone, electricity and water supply to the premises.

A union spokesman said that Singh's actions were the "usual bullying and dictatorial attitude of businessmen". The union has written to Singh demanding that he reinstate the two workers.

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