

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

15 December 2001

Auto workers strike in South Korea

Hyundai workers struck and some 4,000 demonstrated outside the company's main plant in Ulsan on December 14 to demand a share of record profits. The strike followed a series of partial stoppages since November 29. Hyundai expects to make \$US940 million profit this year. Workers are demanding a 12.9 percent wage rise and a bonus equal to five months pay. The company has offered a three-month salary bonus.

At Daewoo Motors, South Korea's other major auto company, Sales Division union members protested on December 12 outside the Pupyong head office against plans to downsize the workforce. Daewoo is being restructured in preparation for its sale to US transnational General Motors.

This week Daewoo subcontractors suspended the supply of auto parts demanding that either Daewoo or General Motors pay 60 percent of the company's unpaid bills. The action forced the company to suspend production in some departments.

Indonesian workers protest against privatisation

On December 10, some 3,000 employees of the cement firm Semen Gresik protested outside the provincial parliament in Surabaya to demand the government drop plans to privatise the group and sell a majority stake to the Mexican firm Cemex SA de CV.

Demonstrations were also held in West Sumatra and North Sulawesi, where Semen Padang and Semen Tonasa, the group's other two units, are located.

The government planned to complete the sale of its 51 percent stake in the publicly listed Semen Gresik group before the end of this year. It has now announced that it will postpone the sale until after January. Shares in the company plunged 9.2 percent in response. Last week, the government completed the sale of its 11.9 percent share in PT Telkom and its 40 percent stake in plantation firm Socfindo.

Police attack Indonesian tour bus workers

Employees of tour bus company Safari Dharma picketed the terminal entrance in Jakarta on December 10 for a 12-point log of claims. Workers are demanding improved pay, the introduction of holiday allowances and the reinstatement of dismissed colleagues.

The government's elite police mobile brigade broke up the action. Two workers and two union activists from the SBSI (the

Indonesian Workers' Union) were arrested and charged with "provoking the workers to demonstrate".

Philippines: Cebu unions prepare for a general strike

The Associated Labour Unions (ALU), which covers port workers in the Cebu district, has called for a general strike early next year. The Central Visayas-Regional Tripartite Wages and Productivity Board has rejected any increase in the minimum wage for the year 2002. This is the first time the board has not granted a rise.

The board has six voting members—two government, two employer and two union representatives. The employer and government representatives voted against any increase, claiming it would cause job losses. Most other regional boards granted rises of between 25 and 30 pesos per day. The current minimum daily wage in Central Visayas is 150 to 195 pesos (about \$US3.20).

The ALU petitioned for an increase of 93 pesos. When the government and employer board members opposed this, the two union board members reduced the demand to 25 pesos, but this was also voted down. Another attempt by the union representatives to get a 20-peso increase also failed.

ALU members are wearing black armbands to work in protest over the decision and preparing for strike action early in the New Year.

Filipino drivers protest against mandatory drug testing

About 400 members of the United Negros Drivers and Operators Centre in the Philippines protested outside the Land Transport Office on December 10 against the introduction of mandatory drug testing when drivers apply for or renew their license. Drivers have denounced the testing as a violation of their rights.

Indian college teachers continue strike action

Teachers in government funded private colleges in the Punjab are on strike for a pension and gratuity scheme. Eighteen have been jailed during the industrial action. On December 10, thousands of teachers from colleges all over the state held a mass rally in Chandigarh, the joint capital of the Punjab and neighbouring Haryana state. The rally was organised by the teachers' Joint Action Committee.

The government has refused the teachers' demand for the pension scheme declaring that the colleges should pay for it. The Punjab and Chandigarh College Teachers Union claims the

state government had already agreed the treasury would pay the teachers' salary claim and benefits but that the finance minister had prevented the decision being implemented.

Australian bank workers strike

Thousands of workers from the ANZ, Westpac and National banks struck for 24 hours on December 13. The action was the first coordinated national strike in the country's major banks in more than 20 years. The workers, who oppose increased workloads and staff shortages, are demanding a new work agreement with improved pay and working conditions.

Over 1,000 bank workers marched through Sydney and protested outside Westpac's annual general meeting in Darling Harbour. Workers in Melbourne held a similar protest outside the National's AGM.

Australian banks have shed over 55,000 jobs and closed 2,000 branches in the last 10 years with little opposition from the banking unions. The restructuring has seen profits soar. The three banks affected by the strike made \$6.5 billion profit over the last 12 months.

Building workers rally against government's inquiry

Over 2,000 building workers walked off building sites across Melbourne on December 11 in protest against the Federal government's royal commission into the building industry. Following a rally in the central business district, the workers marched along Collins Street to Collins Place where the inquiry was being held.

The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) called the demonstration after the commission subpoenaed the union's Victorian secretary, Martin Kingham, and assistant secretary Bill Oliver. The union had previously decided not to participate in the proceedings.

The Howard government initiated the royal commission after its Employment Advocate made unsubstantiated allegations of union thuggery and corruption in the construction industry. The government's action was also facilitated by the CFMEU's national leadership who, in the course of a internal union dispute earlier this year, called on the Crimes Commission to conduct an inquiry into alleged corruption within the Western Australian branch.

Council workers oppose outsourcing

Sydney City Council workers struck and protested outside the Sydney Town Hall on December 13, to oppose "competitive tendering" proposals the council wants in a new work agreement.

The proposals would require the permanent workforce to tender against outside competitors for work. The last round of competitive tendering resulted in the loss of more than 220 jobs. Workers also fear that they will be forced to accept reduced wages and working conditions.

New Zealand teachers' union signs pay deal

The Post Primary Teachers' Association in New Zealand has reached agreement with the Labour government over secondary teachers' pay and conditions. The deal comes after six months

of negotiations and industrial action during the last school term by teachers. As part of their campaign union members voted in November to ban work on a new school qualifications system to be introduced next year.

The deal is significantly less than what was being sought by teachers and entrenches work conditions they had previously condemned as "intolerable". The agreed pay rise of an immediate 2 percent, with a further 1.5 per cent from next July, is well under the \$2,000 per year over three years originally claimed.

Nor will there be any immediate relief for growing workloads. Non-teaching hours have been written into the new contract reflecting the current practice being imposed at most schools. The new contract will be presented to union meetings for ratification in the new school year.

New Zealand university staff vote on further action over pay

Stop-work meetings of university staff were held around the country this week to consider further industrial action over a pay claim. A resolution from the Association of University Staff (AUS) annual conference calling for a 24-hour strike on March 4 next year, to be followed by rolling 24-hour stoppages at university faculties and departments, was endorsed at the meetings.

The industrial action will involve staff from Canterbury, Otago, Victoria, Massey, Waikato and Lincoln universities. Auckland is the only university where staff voted to accept an employer's salary offer of 3 percent by 2002 and a further increase of 1.5 percent in 2003.

Nationally, the AUS is seeking rises of 8 percent a year for the next three years. So far, most university administrations have offered increases of between 1.5 and 2 percent. At a number of universities staff have already begun protest action by withholding examination grades.

This week, staff from Canterbury and Lincoln protested outside a Canterbury University graduation ceremony to draw attention to the breakdown in negotiations.



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