

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

5 October 2002

60,000 teachers march for union rights in Taiwan

In the first ever demonstration of teachers in Taiwan's history, 60,000 teachers and their supporters marched through Taipei to the presidential palace to demand an end to laws that prohibit them from forming a union.

Under an act called the Teachers Law, put in place by Taiwan's former Kuomintang military dictatorship, teachers are classified as public servants and are not permitted to engage in industrial action. Teachers carried banners and placards calling for the right to organise and to strike. They are also calling for teachers to be represented in discussions on education policy.

The march was organised following a decision by the government to abolish a decades-long tax exemption for teachers without adequate compensation in the form of wage rises.

Workers demonstrate against sackings in Indonesia

Some 300 employees of PT Hasri Anekatama, a tape manufacturer near Tangerang, demonstrated outside government offices on October 2 against the sacking of 11 workers. They called on the authorities to stop the company employing workers on a contract system and to prevent it from forcing staff to disband a recently established union. Most of the workers are young women.

Indian power workers on strike

Seven hundred power workers employed by the Jharkand State Electricity Board (JSEB) began indefinite strike action on September 24 over eight demands. They include payment of salary arrears and housing rent allowances, withdrawing a decision to abolish meter reader and bill clerk jobs and the re-employment of three dismissed staff members. The strike has continued in defiance of an ultimatum by JSEB that the strikers will be sacked if they do not report back to work.

Indian hospital workers on go-slow

Staff at the Peerless Hospital and B K Roy Research Institute in Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal, began a go-slow on September 20 to demand payment of their salary increments for this year. Staff in the security and house keeping sections went on strike. According to hospital management, a contractor employed all the workers.

Pakistani doctors fight for a salary increase

House job doctors at the Liaquat Medical University Hospital

campaigned for a salary increase on September 26, wearing black armbands. They also hoisted black flags at the hospital gates. Although the federal government had announced a salary increase for doctors it has not been implemented in Sindh province. At least 100 doctors demonstrated outside the Hyderabad Press Club on September 25 as part of their campaign. Since September 27, the doctors have been holding two-hour stoppages.

Sri Lankan transport workers on strike

Public sector drivers struck on September 30 for an eight-hour day and against a government decision to begin hiring vehicles. The All Ceylon Federation of Drivers Unions called the strike. The workers marched from Colombo Municipal Council to the Department of Finance to present a memorandum. The federation has said that drivers will begin a hunger strike if the government fails to respond to their demands by next week.

The week before, workers at the Kirindiwela bus depot, 35 kilometres from Colombo, struck over the non-payment of their August salaries. Management of the company says there is no income to pay the salaries and no funds are provided by the government. Out of 66 buses only 36 are in running condition.

Packaging workers sacked in South Australia

NCI Packaging in Adelaide, South Australia, sacked eleven workers, mostly members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), on September 30. The AMWU claims the sackings are an attempt to de-unionise the shop. On October 2 and October 3, some 30 AMWU members established a picket line at the plant. The company called police on both days and the dispute has now been taken into the industrial courts. In an ominous sign that the sacked men are unlikely to be reinstated, the AMWU delegate at NCI told the media that the dispute could have been avoided if the company had been "flexible".

Victorian doctors strike over pay and conditions

About 60 junior and senior doctors, including surgeons and anaesthetists from the Box Hill Hospital, walked off the job on October 2 in protest over working conditions and pay. The doctors attended a rally outside the hospital to vote for bans on non-essential paperwork. They claim they are working long hours of unpaid overtime and need better provisions for breaks and study leave.

The Australian Medical Association warned that unless a new workplace agreement was settled soon with the Victorian Department of Human Services, the walkout would mark the beginning of a series of stoppages across the entire state.

Road service workers take strike action

About 400 NRMA road services workers, whose job is to fix members' vehicles when they break down, struck on September 30 over a new wages and conditions agreement and disciplinary procedures. The affected areas were metropolitan Sydney, Canberra, Newcastle and Wollongong. They returned to work on October 1. Negotiations between unions and management have resumed.

Brisbane garbage collectors strike

Garbage collectors in Brisbane struck on October 1 over safety concerns. In the past three months there have been more than 60 cases of a new line of garbage trucks getting caught up in over-head power lines and other cables. The workers are concerned one of them or a member of the public could be electrocuted. The collectors returned to work on October 3. They have blacklisted 132 properties where there are low hanging cables unless management provides smaller trucks.

New Zealand port workers reject employer-union deal

Workers at the Port of Lyttelton rejected an employment agreement this week brokered by the Council of Trade Unions (CTU) to settle their long-running dispute with port management. The dispute centres on the company's drive to establish a 24-hour container handling operation.

CTU Secretary Paul Goulter said he had been working towards a proposed settlement between the port and unions, "but it wasn't accepted by staff". CTU President Ross Wilson was forced to reject reports that there had been intimidation of workers by officials within the port unions, who were blaming the workers for impending job losses.

The failure to impose the agreement has been cited by business and media interests as a major reason for P&O Nedlloyd's decision to bypass Lyttelton and base its container service at Dunedin's Port Chalmers. Waterfront Workers' Union President Les Wells agreed, saying ongoing employment disputes contributed to P&O's decision. He claimed there was "fault on both sides of the negotiating table".

Otago University starts litigation against striking staff

The University of Otago has issued legal proceedings and begun suspending staff as industrial action over a long-running pay dispute deepens. The university this week issued an injunction, ordering members of the Association of University Staff (AUS) to stop taking part in "secret strike action"—where the university was not informed of the timing, duration or place of action.

Academic and general staff have been holding rolling stoppages and other forms of action against the university administration. The university's general staff joined academics in the dispute late last week, after 406 staff rejected taking the offer to ratification and a lump-sum payment of \$NZ200. As

well as taking part in the stoppages, the general staff voted to work-to-rule and hold back financial reports due at the end of the week.

The university's top offer to date is 3 percent (plus a \$200 lump-sum for general staff). It opened negotiations offering 1.5 percent in response to an 8 percent union claim. Meanwhile, Massey University employees are considering an offer of a 3.5 percent pay rise. Staff unions at Massey entered negotiations with their employer late last week.

NZ medical therapists vote on pay offer

Therapists taking industrial action at MidCentral Health voted on a revised pay offer this week. The results are yet to be announced. About 85 Public Service Association members have withdrawn services from various wards at Palmerston North Hospital for the past three weeks. They have also been working to rule, withdrawn good will and withheld statistics.

The therapists want an 8.5 percent increase to their base salaries over a 12-18 month term. MidCentral's offer is 6 percent over 30 months, plus increased education leave, improved access to funding for professional development and "competency" payments.

Fiji financial sector employees call for strike

About 400 employees of Colonial Life Insurance met with officials of the Fiji Bank and Finance Sector Employees Union this week. Officials said monthly meeting with company management to resolve a number of issues including a salary structure are making no progress. The workers voted to strike next week if the issues are not resolved.

Fiji bus company forced to accept union members

The Fiji Labour and Industrial Relations Ministry this week issued a Compulsory Recognition Order (CRO) on Raiwaqa Buses, forcing the management to allow its employees to join the Transport Workers Union (TWU).

The court decision followed a protracted struggle between workers and management which began after four drivers were sacked for joining the union. Although the company was forced by a disputes committee to reinstate the drivers they were later sacked for refusing to wash buses.

Labour Minister Prem Singh has directed that "all employees are to return to the position they occupied prior to their dismissal and shall enjoy all terms and conditions that were in existence then". The union has now registered a complaint with the ministry claiming the bus company has made unlawful deductions from employee's wages.



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