

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

19 October 2002

Sacked Indonesian workers blockade

About 500 workers employed by PT Hyunsung Indonesia in Tangerang have been picketing the plant since October 14 to prevent its South Korean company director, Joe Yong Seun, from leaving.

The blockade began when Seun closed the factory and told workers they were all dismissed. The company, which produces Targus computer bags, says it will only pay each worker about 590,000 rupiah (\$US65) or the equivalent of one month's salary severance pay. Workers want twice that amount.

The company gave no warning of the closure and has not given any reason for the decision. One employee told the *Jakarta Post* that the company exported three containers of computer bags to the US last weekend.

The dismissed workers will face extreme difficulty finding alternate work. The Tangerang region has already experienced a string of closures and layoffs. Earlier this month Nike contractor PT Doson laid off 7,000 workers after the US shoe company stopped placing orders in June. Many PT Doson workers who did not receive severance pay are still picketing the factory.

Korean hospital workers support striking colleagues

On October 16, about 5,000 hospital workers from 150 hospitals throughout the South Korea stopped work and attended solidarity demonstrations for striking colleagues at five Catholic hospitals.

Strike action at the Catholic hospitals begun on March 19 and has continued for 147 days. The Korean Health and Medical Workers Union (KHMWU) called the strikes as part of a broad campaign for new work contracts at 136 hospitals. Negotiations in all but the five Catholic hospitals were concluded before or following a KHMWU general strike on May 23.

The KHMWU has announced plans to hold another

mass strike in November if the dispute is not settled.

Philippine court employees protest over loss of allowances

Philippine court employees launched a campaign this week against legislation allowing the government to abolish employees' monthly work allowance. The move is designed to fund a salary increase for judges and government lawyers. Lunchtime rallies are being held outside justice offices in major cities and court employees are calling on fellow workers to black ban legislators who support the bill.

The protests are being organised by the Council of Presidents, an informal federation of all court-based organisations at the Palace of Justice in Cebu.

Indian municipal workers on strike over salary dues

Some 200 employees at the Hazaribag Municipal Corporation in India's Bihar state began an indefinite strike on October 13 to demand payment of their last two month's salary.

Sanitation work in the municipal area came to a halt as a result of the strike, causing garbage to pile up in the city during the Durga Puja religious festival. According to the Safai Mazdoor Union, which covers the striking workers, there will not be a resumption of work until the back salaries are paid.

Sri Lankan power workers start sick leave campaign

About 3,000 workers at the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) called in sick on October 9 to protest against the CEB reform bill being debated in the parliament on the same day. The following day workers held a sit-down protest outside CEB headquarters in Colombo.

Under the bill, the state-owned enterprise will be divided in to eight separate sections and handed over to private companies. The employment future of the 14,500 CEB workers is uncertain. Ceylon Electricity

Employees Union secretary Ranjan Jayalal has alleged that management pressured workers not to participate in the protests.

Australian prison nurses strike over staff shortages

Nurses from the Risdon Prison in Tasmania walked off the job on October 14 over staff shortages, working conditions and pay.

A spokesperson for the Australian Nursing Federation claimed that staff shortages had resulted in only four to five nurses being rostered on from Monday to Friday, instead of the normal eight. There are currently 10 nursing positions vacant at the hospital.

The union also claimed that the 28-bed hospital unit was so overcrowded that prisoners are sharing single bed cells. The nurses returned to work after receiving a commitment from prison authorities their concerns would be addressed in management-union talks next week.

Brewery workers defend union delegate

About 300 workers at Carlton & United Breweries' Abbotsford plant in Victoria went on strike for 48 hours on October 16 to oppose the sacking of a senior union delegate.

The management suspended the man for allegedly reporting for work while intoxicated. The Liquor, Hospitality & Miscellaneous Workers' Union claims he was removed because he is an active union member and the company is attempting to "undermine the role of union representatives in the workplace". The dispute is due to go before the industrial court.

Female clerks oppose discrimination

Female clerks employed by Woolworths in the Sydney suburb of Blacktown began legal action against the retail giant this week in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. The company has offered the women only half the redundancy settlement recently paid to its male storemen and packers. The women, some with 30 years service, will be made redundant when Woolworths relocates its accounts department to Tasmania.

Roslyn Stanborough, 58, said that the company's offer would mean she was short-changed by \$12,000. "We feel completely let down, treated like we are expendable," she said. "After 17 years with the company, it's pretty shabby treatment".

Company fined miniscule amount for worker's

death

New Zealand company Donaghys Industries was fined just \$15,000 in the Christchurch District Court on October 16 over a fatal accident earlier this year.

The victim, a permanent employee with 17 years experience, was killed when he fell from a knitting machine platform. Service Manager of the Occupational Safety and Health Service Canterbury West Coast Region Margaret Radford told the court that the work platform "had inadequate guarding in place to prevent a person from falling when performing normal work activities".

Hospital maintenance workers accept revised pay offer

A strike over pay and working conditions by stores and maintenance workers at Bay of Plenty hospital in New Zealand was called off this week after an agreement was reached with the local health board.

Last week the 40 workers gave a two-week notice to strike after the hospital offered them only a 0.5 percent pay rise, conditional on workers agreeing to trade off conditions. The latest offer is for a 2.75 percent pay rise and four extra days' sick leave. The board dropped its demand that workers surrender their protected trade allowances.

PNG maritime workers threaten strike over award negotiations

The Papua New Guinea Workers Industrial Union, representing 3,000 maritime workers, has warned the government it will call a strike in four weeks time if a tribunal is not set up to address the workers' demand for a 20 percent pay rise.

Maritime workers held a five-day strike in May when stevedoring companies refused to agree to a new contract upgrading working conditions negotiated in 1997 and 1999. The strikers returned to work when the government promised to set up an arbitration tribunal to resolve the issue.



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