Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

16 November 2002

Indonesian journalists rally against assaults

Hundreds of members of the Alliance of Independent Journalists rallied in Bandar Lampung on November 12 to protest against the assault of three journalists in Lampung and Pontianak. The protestors demanded the authorities investigate the incidents thoroughly.

Syaifullah, a photojournalist for the *Lampung Post*, was attacked by a group of police officers in Lampung on November 11. He was beaten and his camera confiscated when he attempted to photograph police beating up a motorist who had collided with their car.

Equator journalist Anton Perdana and Rizal Ardiyansyah from the Volare radio station were assaulted in Pontianak on November 11 by a member of the city's legislative council. The attack may have been related to an article written by Anton about an alleged case of bribery involving a councilor.

Thai port workers disrupt privatisation meeting

A protest by port workers has caused the Thai government to suspend plans to privatise the profitable Port Authority of Thailand (PAT). At the end of last week about 50 workers demonstrated outside a meeting between PAT officials and the Thanachart consultancy agency that had been hired to oversee the sale of port terminals. The meeting was "suspended indefinitely" after workers threatened to stop officials from leaving the building. Port workers fear that privatisation will result in the wholesale destruction of jobs and working conditions.

Despite the suspension, a government official said the privatisation would "proceed eventually" although "the process could drag on for a year or longer". To facilitate the sale of Bangkok Port, PAT is continuing to modernise the terminal and will introduce electronic processing of cargo there within the next two years.

In an attempt to break-up the opposition of port workers, the government is planning to stagger the sale of terminals. The PAT will privatise Laem Chabang commercial port first, which employs about 200 workers, and then sell the major Bangkok Port, which employs 3,800.

Pakistani teachers and doctors fight privatisation

Over the past 10 days Pakistani teachers and doctors have demonstrated in major cities such as Rawalpindi, Lahore and Multan. The protests were organised against a government proposal to set-up a "Board of Governors" to run educational institutions and hospitals.

The board will be mostly comprised of business people and its aim is to commercialise education and health. Professionals believe the creation of the board is a step towards the privatisation of services.

Teachers at schools and colleges in Rawalpindi attended work wearing black armbands and organised rallies and marches inside their institutions. They also imposed class boycotts. In Multan, teachers held a rally on November 7 with the support of students. In Lahore police baton-charged a demonstration of teachers. The attack has been condemned by the Lahore Joint Action Committee of doctors and teachers who called a day of protest over police harassment on November 11.

Sri Lankan teachers demand improved conditions

Thousands of Sri Lankan teachers, principals and education administrators went on sick leave on November 12 and demonstrated outside the Education Department in Colombo. The teachers then marched to Parliament to deliver their demands to the prime minister but were blocked by police.

The teachers are demanding the elimination of all salary anomalies and an end to nepotistic promotions. They are also seeking the payment of salary arrears and equal opportunity for all teachers to serve in national and popular schools.

Sri Lankan health workers on strike

Auxiliary staff at the government hospital in Watupitiwala, 30 kilometres from Colombo, went on strike on November 11 in support of a seven-item log of claims, including a uniform allowance. The strike bought the hospital to a standstill except for the treatment of a few outpatients.

Prior to striking, the staff reported to work in civil attire for one week as a protest. They also picketed the hospital on November 5. The workers are members of the All Ceylon Health Service Workers Union.

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Australian auto repair workers protest misuse of funds

Dozens of roadside assistance workers employed by the Royal Automotive Club in Victoria (RACV) picketed the company's headquarters in Melbourne on November 12 over the alleged misuse of superannuation funds.

Workers allege that funds from their superannuation scheme have been used by the company to finance redundancies. When informed by the union of the alleged misuse of funds, the Australian Prudential Relation Authority (APRA) issued a statement declaring the practice "improper". Workers are demanding the company restore all money to the fund immediately.

Transport union ends strike over sackings

Drivers for Premier Illawarra bus company on the NSW South Coast struck for 24 hours on November 12 and picketed the company depot in protest against the sacking of two colleagues. Management claimed that the dismissed drivers had worked in other jobs whilst on sick leave. The company allegedly used private investigators to spy on the two workers.

The Transport Workers Union (TWU) called for an end to the strike in line with a recommendation from the Industrial Relations Commission. A TWU spokesman claimed that the drivers were "happy to return to work" because the "commission has reopened negotiations". The company, however, has not given any assurances it will rehire the sacked workers and declared that it stands by its decision to dismiss them.

New Zealand cricket players end strike

New Zealand's leading international and domestic cricket players this week settled a six-week long contract dispute with the NZ Cricket, the sport's administrating body. Players have been involved in strikes since October 1.

The players agreed to accept the conditions in a four-year contract. The contract includes a $NZ5.1 million annual player payment pool, a $100,000 increase on NZ Cricket's previous offer but well under the $7.2 million originally sought by the recently-formed Cricket Players' Association (CPA). The increase represents on average a 15 percent pay rise.

The players' strikes resulted in the cancellation of two major domestic tournaments and threatened the upcoming international series against India. The CPA rejected an initial offer of $470,000, then a second $5 million offer.

NZ college lecturers suspended over pay dispute

Lecturers at Wellington College of Education were suspended on November 12 after the college principal declared their ongoing industrial action to be "untenable" with employment at the teacher training institution. The 57 lecturers have withheld students' grades for the last fortnight and had voted for a series of two-hour rolling strikes if their claims over pay and workloads were not met by mid-week.

The college had refused to move from its original pay offer of 2.5 percent even though the Association of Staff in Tertiary Education (ASTE), which covers the lecturers, reduced its claim to 3.25 percent. There is considerable support for the lecturers among the college's 1,200 students.

Fiji customs officers oppose management spying

Customs officers at Fiji's Nadi Airport stopped work for 24 hours on November 7 over attempts by management to spy on them.

The 50 officers are demanding a surveillance camera installed in the arrival area in 1999 be placed under their control or removed. Despite an agreement that the camera would only be used to observe arrivals, the officers allege that about a month ago it was trained on them by management.

The strike left five senior customs management staff to handle the flow of tourists and locals departing and arriving on international flights.

Construction workers end action in Tahiti

Construction workers employed by the French building company Bouygues to build a hospital in Papeete, Tahiti ended industrial action last weekend after the company agreed to withdraw 150 dismissal notices. The workers had been sacked for going on strike.

Last week the industrial court declared the sackings unlawful and instructed the company to rehire the workers. Just hours later the construction workers blockaded Papeete's eastern entrances causing major traffic jams. They took the action believing that Bouygues would not comply with the court ruling and would sack them again within days.

The dispute was finally settled after a five-hour meeting between the government and company representatives. The company has agreed to employ the workers until at least January 15 and the government said it would reimburse them for wages lost during the strike.

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