

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

10 May 2003

Korean port workers strike declared illegal

South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun has declared a strike by port workers in Pohang illegal. The workers walked off the job early this week demanding improvements in employment contract arrangements. The strike has affected the shipment of products from the city's major steel makers such as POSCO and INI Steel.

Roh ordered officials at the ministries of economy, labor, transportation, and administration and home affairs to "take stern and clear steps on the disruption of social order in Pohang". Another government spokesman threatened tough measures to bust the strike, including the prosecution of union leaders and a crack down on pickets stopping transport vehicles entering the port.

Rolling strikes by 400 private truck drivers in Pohang and Masan have also disrupted the movement of steel. The drivers, who are members of the Korea Cargo Transportation Worker's Union, struck for the fifth day in a row on May 6. They are demanding an increase in freight charges and reductions in diesel fuel tax and highway tolls.

Indonesian plantation workers demand improved conditions

Workers employed by PT Tolan Tiga Indonesia on plantations in Aceh, North Sumatra, Palembang, Bengkulu and West Java went on strike on April 30. The strikers want a 20 percent pay increase, a 6 percent bonus backdated to last year and transport allowances. They are also seeking the reinstatement of 21 days cut from their annual leave.

The strike was the first-ever national action by workers on PT Tolan Tiga Indonesia's tea, palm oil and rubber plantations. A spokesman for the workers said that a five-day strike was planned if their demands are not met. The company is a subsidiary of Belgian firm S.A. SIPEF N.V.

Indian bank workers strike over pay and conditions

Some 200,000 bank workers in India went on strike on May 2 to demand salary increases and improved working conditions. The strike affected 27 institutions.

Officers from state-run banks, including the Bank of Baroda, Bank of India and the State Bank of India, the country's largest commercial bank, joined the strike. State banks account for around 70 percent of all bank deposits and advances. Staff at most private sector banks also participated.

Banking unions claim that salary increases have been stalled since 1999 and that a deadline for a pay rise passed six months ago. Bank workers also expressed their anger over the government's privatisation program and are planning strike action on May 21 to oppose it.

Pakistani sugar workers protest sackings

Fauji Sugar Mills employees in Khosaki, Badin district, demonstrated outside the local press club on May 1 to protest the sacking of 248 workers. A protest was also held in front of the mill on April 30.

The mill owner claims the plant was running at a loss. There are 27 sugar mills in the Sindh province, of which Badin is a district, but few are operating.

Postal workers on sick note campaign in Sri Lanka

Postal workers in Sri Lanka have begun an industrial campaign for improved working conditions. The demands include cost-of-living pay rises, the timely filling of staff vacancies and increased opportunities for promotion. The workers also want government assurances that the postal service will not be privatised.

As part of the campaign, workers reported in sick over two days from May 5, causing disruption to services. The Front of Unions for Protecting the Postal Service, which organised the action, said that employees were planning an indefinite strike if they did not receive a satisfactory response from the government.

Sri Lankan rubber workers oppose plantation destruction

About 600 workers from the Kumara Watta rubber plantation in Sri Lanka have been on strike since April 28. The state-owned plantation is located in Moneragala, in Sri Lanka's Uva province. The workers are opposing management plans to uproot 7,000 rubber trees to make way for sugar cane. The move will result in the destruction of jobs. Three years ago the company cleared 300 acres of rubber trees.

South Australian TV staff walk out over wages

Workers at WIN Television in Mount Gambier in South Australia walked off the job for three hours late last week demanding improved wages. At present WIN workers are not covered by an enterprise work agreement.

They claim that television camera crew wages are "abysmal". A camera operator's base wage is \$585.80 a week and their work involves lighting, sound and editing, and they are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They receive no extra pay for being on standby.

WIN television workers at Riverland in South Australia may also take strike action. WIN Television owner Bruce Gordon is refusing to meet with the Community and Public Sector Union to discuss the issues.

Metal workers continue picket at Sydney factory

Sixty workers from Morris MacMahon Manufacturing in the Sydney suburb of Arncliffe are continuing protest action outside

the metal products factory. The workers, who are members of the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union (AMWU), began strike action on March 10, after management attempted to force them onto Australian Workplace Agreements.

The company, which is attempting to maintain production with scab labour, also opposed any AMWU involvement in contract negotiations. Seven of the striking workers have been sent termination notices, claiming they intimidated management and staff. The metal workers are paid less than \$12 an hour and the company has refused to pay award penalty rates or allowances.

Tasmanian airline staff ordered back to work

Industrial action by eight Qantas baggage handlers and truck drivers at Hobart airport on May 7 was rapidly ended when the Australian Industrial Relations Commission ordered the workers to return to work. The strike was over unresolved rostering issues. The Transport Workers Union, which covers the employees, declined to comment on the outcome.

Labor government rules out job security

Thousands of Queensland public sector workers may strike because the state Labor government has refused to include clauses on job security in a proposed 2003 enterprise work agreement. The clauses state that no permanent employee shall be forcibly retrenched and workers on temporary employment contracts should be made permanent after two years.

The Labor government has axed 1,400 jobs since coming to power in June 1998 and recently announced that another 2,500 will be eliminated.

As part of the new contract arrangement public sector workers are also seeking an 8 percent pay increase. The government has only offered 3.5 percent.

Strike talks held at New Zealand mill

Negotiations between the Kinleith timber mill management and the Engineering Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU) on May 7 broke down within hours. The meeting, the first between the parties in over a month, was to end a three-month strike by 270 production workers.

The workers walked out in March over wage cuts and health and safety concerns, following the sacking of almost half the mill's 700-strong workforce in January. Mill owner Carter Holt Harvey has threatened to close operations altogether and mothball the plant.

Senior production delegate Whiskey Hastie said some workers had received letters advising them that management wanted to discuss "solution options". However, a management spokesman said there was nothing new on the table.

New Zealand doctors' dispute ends

A long-running dispute between Timaru Hospital senior doctors and the South Canterbury District Health Board ended this week. The contract dispute, which began last June, saw doctors hold the first-ever strike action by senior medical staff at a New Zealand hospital.

A spokesman for the Association of Salaried and Medical Specialist said union members received a pay rise but the most important "coup" was getting an independent review of working conditions. The doctors had earlier rejected the terms of a proposed review because they did not trust the hospital

management to abide by its findings.

New Zealand nurses stop work over pay

New Zealand nurses held stop-work meetings this week to demand a pay increase for nurses, midwives and health care assistants. The meetings followed the release of a survey that found nurses are being "significantly underpaid".

The NZ Nurses' Organisation (NZNO) wants starting salaries for graduate nurses to start at \$NZ40,000 and progress to \$52,000 for a fifth-year nurse. South Island nurses currently start on \$29,932, with North Island nurses on \$33,252. The new pay scale would involve a rise of up to 30 percent for the lowest paid.

The NZNO claims that the pay gap will not be closed under current District Health Boards budgets. The union plans to participate in a working party with government and undertake negotiations. No industrial action is planned.

Union officials arrested in picket line

Two National Distribution Union (NDU) officials, including its president Bill Andersen, were arrested on a picket outside the Point Chavalier premises of Taylor Healthcare Services in Auckland. Laundry workers began picketing the premises during a strike this week when pay talks broke down.

The arrests occurred on day one of the strike, after pickets refused to allow delivery trucks driven by non-union members in to the premises. A strikers' spokesman said the police had let the trucks through and the pickets had no option but to stop scabs from doing their work.

Government holds back teachers' pay

More than 5,000 teachers in Papua New Guinea have not been paid since mid-April. The Education Department and Teaching Services are refusing to pay the teachers on the grounds that they did not submit a Resumption Duty Form (RDF) by the required date of April 18. The forms are submitted each year by teachers when they resume duty after the December holiday break.

Papua New Guinea Teachers Association Mendi branch president, John Nono Kara, said the national education office had been late sending the RDF forms to teachers. He blamed the "restoration committee, the caretaker minister and governor, the administrator and people who are responsible for controlling funds" for the situation.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact