

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

12 July 2003

South Korean auto workers continue strikes

Workers at Hyundai Motors, South Korea's largest auto manufacturer, voted on July 9 to continue rolling strikes up to July 16. The workers are campaigning for a log-of-claims that includes a 40-hour week, wage increases for temporary workers and participation in management decisions involving investments. The company employs about 50,000 people, including 8,000 temporary workers, on its assembly lines.

US-German auto transnational DaimlerChrysler AG owns 10 percent of Hyundai Motors.

Indonesian footwear workers protest over allowances

About 5,000 workers from footwear company PT Fortune Mate Indonesia (FMI) demonstrated in Surabaya on July 8 to demand better working conditions and the restoration of allowances.

The protesters demanded the sacking of the company's human resources department, which they claim abolished a payment for female workers that allowed them to stay home during menstruation. The workers also demanded the doubling of their daily food and transport allowance to 3,000 rupiahs (\$US0.36).

One protester said workers had no other option but to protest about the food and transportation allowances "because they often have to pay the shortfalls". The workers organised the protest independently of their local union because it had "failed to address their grievances".

Strike in Tamil Nadu continues despite sackings

The government in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu has recruited over 5,000 casual workers as part of its effort to break a strike by tens of thousands of public sector workers. The strike, for the restoration of benefits and allowances slashed by the government, entered its eighth week on July 19.

The government has amended the Essential Services Maintenance Act to give it greater powers to dismiss striking workers. Five of the main office bearers of the Tamil Nadu Secretariat Staff Association, including its president, were the first to be sacked. To date, about one third of those on strike have been dismissed.

Sri Lankan volunteer teachers demand employment

Volunteer teachers in Sinhala medium schools in the north and east of Sri Lanka demonstrated in front of the Education, Cultural and Sports Ministry of the North East Provincial

Council on June 30. The teachers are demanding the government give them confirmation of future employment.

Around 50 teachers from remote areas such as Ampara, Dehiattakandiya, Kantale and Trincomalee participated in the demonstration and carried placards and banners inscribed with their demands. There are about 1,132 volunteer teachers whose employment is yet to be confirmed.

Earlier, volunteer teachers had conducted a hunger strike in front of the Education Ministry in Colombo but ended the action when the Education Minister assured them he would meet their demand.

Bangladeshi jute mill workers fight for back pay

Hundreds of employees from the Amin Jute Mills in Chittagong demonstrated and set up roadblocks on July 3 to demand back pay. Amin operates the largest jute mills in Bangladesh, with a total of 5,000 workers, of whom 3,400 are permanent and 1,600 temporary.

Pakistani newspaper workers protest over wages

Journalists and newspaper workers held a daylong protest on the Dr Ziauddin Ahmed Road in Karachi on July 1 to demand a wage increase. The action was part of a nation-wide campaign against the refusal of employers to implement the recommendation of a state wage board. The protest campaign was organised by the Karachi Union of Journalists. A number of political parties, NGOs and activists also took part.

Australian TV actors vote for industrial action

On July 8, Australian television actors voted for a national 24-hour strike next week and a ban on all weekend work. The union action will affect the production of leading programs such as *All Saints*, *Home and Away*, *Neighbours* and the *Secret Life of Us*.

The action comes after eight months of negotiations between the union and the Screen Producers Association of Australia failed to reach an agreement. Outstanding issues include improved residuals for film and television productions and repeat fees for TV productions.

The performers are also demanding better treatment for guest cast members on TV productions. The union cited the example of performers being paid for only one day after being told to be available for a week. A spokesman said: "In no other industry would that kind of arrangement be acceptable." Some actors employed on ongoing television dramas "earn less than the

national average wage,” despite being “the best-paid performers in our industry”.

Bus drivers strike after negotiations break down

Bus drivers at Southern Coast Transit in Western Australia voted overwhelmingly on July 8 for an indefinite strike after talks in the Industrial Relations Commission this week failed to resolve their dispute.

The 320 drivers are demanding the company guarantee a 7.6-hour working day. Currently they are expected to work split shifts ranging from four to 10 hours a day. The strike will affect services in the towns of Rockingham, Kwinana, Cockburn, Fremantle and Melville. Pickets have been set up at the company’s three depots to prevent buses leaving.

Building workers protest attack on union official

About 200 construction workers walked off city sites in Perth on July 9 and rallied outside the gate of builder Gerry Hanssen’s Westralian project. They were protesting over the alleged assault of Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union assistant secretary Joe McDonald on the site.

McDonald was assaulted by a group of men after he stopped a concrete pour in an area declared unsafe by the WorkSafe authority due to muddy conditions. The union official was pushed against steelwork, injuring his back.

On the weekend, Hanssen told the media there could be violence on his sites in response to visits by union officials. He admitted that WorkSafe had placed a prohibition notice preventing work at the Westralian site last week but claimed he had made improvements. WorkSafe senior inspector Noel Byrne said the improvements were inadequate and it “was not a safe working environment”.

In 2000, a union organiser was bashed on the Bluewater apartments site in South Perth, another of Hanssen’s projects.

Hospital employees walk out over pay

About 300 auxiliary hospital workers in Perth walked off the job on July 10 to campaign for a 10 percent pay increase. Members of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMWU), they are employed by Mayne Health at the Joondalup Health Campus and three other private Perth hospitals. They attended a stop-work meeting to discuss further action.

In a separate dispute, LHMWU members at the Swan Village of Care nursing home in Bentley stopped work for 24 hours on July 10, demanding a \$1 an hour pay increase.

Cleaners picket Auckland night club

Cleaners picketed the Showgirls club during the last weekend in June when the management of Santa Fe Gold, a company that runs several Auckland nightclubs, sacked five cleaners after they joined the Unite Union. The workers had contacted the union after being subjected to verbal abuse, racist comments and an assault. The workers complained they were not being paid sick pay or days off in lieu for working public holidays, and were required to work 6-7 hours without a break.

The picket started with 15 people and swelled 40 at its height,

and continued despite police harassment. Two hours before the second day of picketing began the union received a call from the management asking it not to go ahead. The management admitted the previous picket had cost over \$10,000 in lost takings.

Santa Fe Gold subsequently agreed to investigate the allegations and reinstate any worker found to be wrongly dismissed. It also agreed to consider a collective employment contract and acknowledged employees’ right to join the union.

New Zealand council workers vote to strike

Almost all 150 council staff covered by the Public Service Association (PSA) have voted to intensify a campaign of industrial action in the support of a 6 percent pay claim. The Invercargill City Council, Environment Southland, Southland District Council and the Gore District Council have offered only 5 percent, spread over two years.

Region-wide stop-work meetings by council staff closed the Invercargill Public Library last week. A spokesman for the PSA said members were demanding the union take action with “minimum notice and maximum disruption”.

New Zealand health care workers continue action

Community support workers employed by IHC threatened this week to extend their ban on driving company vehicles, which was imposed as part of a campaign for a 3 percent pay rise. For the past two weeks, the workers have refused to drive IHC vans on Mondays. This will be extended to Fridays as well, unless the organisation improves on its 1.5 percent wage offer. The workers are also boycotting “non-essential” reporting requirements of the Ministry of Health.

The bans have forced IHC managers to drive the vans or use taxis to ferry intellectually disabled people between homes and sheltered workshops. The IHC claims its pay offer equates to a \$1.5 million increase in the organisation’s wages bill and is the “absolute maximum” it can afford under current government funding.

An advocate for the Service and Food Workers Union said its 2,000 members at IHC earned \$NZ11.65 or \$12.65 an hour and should not have to subsidise budget shortfalls by seeing their wages slip further against inflation. The workers are considering all-out strike action if the work bans fail to produce an improved offer.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact