

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

27 September 2003

Indonesian workers demand reinstatement

Representatives of sacked workers from PT Texmaco Group in Central Java protested outside the province's legislative council in Semarang on September 24. The delegation from the Texmaco Workers Rescue Communication Forum called on provincial authorities to force the company to reinstate the 1,540 workers it laid off between January and September this year. PT Texmaco also suspended another 2,550 workers on 75 percent pay during the same period.

Workers sacked outright were only given one month's severance pay and those still employed frequently receive their wages 10 days late. The group employs 8,000 people at five subsidiaries in Central Java—PT Texmaco Taman Synthetics, Polisyndo Eka Perkasa, Texmaco Perkasa Engineering, Texmaco Jaya and Multi Karsa Investasi. The government's Indonesian Bank Restructuring Agency owns the majority of the group's shares.

Indonesian miners end strike for bonus payment

About 2,300 workers from PT Kaltim Prima Coal in East Kalimantan returned to work on September 21, after being on strike since August 29. They were demanding a 15 percent share of the proceeds from the sale of the mine by the energy company BP Plc and Rio Tinto. The sale will bring in \$US500 million and retire \$187 million worth of debt.

Unions agreed to end the strike, even though there are still differences between workers and management. While rejecting the 15 percent claim, the company agreed to pay 50 billion rupiah (\$US6 million) as a "goodwill payment". Differences exist over how the payment will be distributed and whether it will be taxed. Management has agreed to drop threats of disciplinary action against striking workers but refused to pay employees for the period when they were on strike.

Two accidents in Chinese coal mines

Two accidents in China over the last week have claimed the lives of 24 coal miners. Fifteen men were killed at Sangshuping Coal mine in Shanxi province on September 19 when water from disused coal shafts flooded into the mine.

Seven trapped miners were rescued.

On September 21, nine miners plunged to their deaths at the state-owned Dongfanghong mine in Jiangxi province when the steel cable on a carriage taking the men underground snapped.

Over the past eight months there have been 4,150 deaths in China's mines.

Taiwan telecom workers protest

A 5,000-strong demonstration of Chunhwa Telecom workers and their supporters rallied outside the Taiwan legislature on September 23 to protest against privatisation of the communications carrier and other state-owned enterprises. The 29,000 Telecom workers fear massive job losses if government plans to sell off the enterprise go ahead.

Around 50 unions were represented at the demonstration. Workers held banners and shouted slogans such as "Save public assets", "Down with business groups ruling the country," and "Protection of the welfare of labour".

Sri Lankan workers protest

National Water Supplies and Drainage Board employees in Sri Lanka picketed regional offices during their lunch-hour from September 15 to September 19. They want a pay increase and the resolution of certain salary anomalies. Workers from the State Engineering Corporation also demonstrated outside the company's office in central Colombo on September 19 over a series of demands. They are opposing management plans to liquidate the corporation and want management to find new contracts to maintain jobs. Workers also want salaries to be paid at the scheduled times and payment of all arrears to the Employer Provident Fund.

Indian airport workers on fasting campaign

Airport workers at Thiruvananthapuram international airport began a campaign of protest and fasting outside the international terminal on September 18. They are demanding the Indian government reverse its decision to privatise airports. Workers are also planning to disrupt services by taking leave simultaneously.

The Airport Authority Employees Union condemned the government for pushing through legislation that hands over

profitable airports to private companies.

Teachers in Western Australia protest for pay increase

Over 400 teachers demonstrated outside Parliament House in Perth on September 24 in support of a pay increase. Teachers in Western Australia (WA) are demanding a 30 percent pay increase over three years. State Labor Premier Geoff Gallop and Education and Training Minister Alan Carpenter have offered only 14.3 percent over two-and-half years.

Last week, 7,000 WA teachers attended a stop-work meeting as part of joint strike action by teachers in three states for separate but similar demands. The WA campaign includes teachers from public schools, Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) campuses and child care services.

Sugar workers strike over demarcation

Workers at sugar mills in Condong, Broadwater and Harwood in northern New South Wales (NSW) walked off the job for 24 hours on September 22 over a job demarcation issue. A meeting between the unions and the NSW Sugar Milling Co-operative failed to resolve the dispute and further industrial action is threatened.

Mines strike over wage

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members at the Mount Thorley Mine in NSW's Hunter Valley walked off the job for six hours on September 24. The miners have held rolling stoppages for five weeks to demand improved wages and working conditions as part of a new enterprise agreement.

Bus drivers strike over new agreement

Bus drivers employed by Moorabbin Transit Bus Services in Melbourne went on strike on September 24 after negotiations over a new workplace agreement broke down. The stop-work lasted four hours while drivers heard a report from Transport Workers Union officials on negotiations with the company. Drivers rejected the company's pay offer of 10.1 percent over three years. The snap strike affected all of the firm's 14 bus routes.

Waterfront workers picket New Zealand port

Waterfront workers and supporters picketed South Port at the South Island town of Bluff on September 21 to prevent contract workers employed by Mainland Stevedoring loading of *Paesea*, a log-carrier. About 20 protesters blocked a van carrying labour from Mainland Stevedoring entering the port for about an hour before police arrived to escort the vehicle through the picket.

The long-running dispute with Mainland Stevedoring has resulted in a series of pickets at ports throughout the South Island over the past four years. The union campaign, which is supported by the NZ Council of Trade Unions, pits "local" workers against "outsiders" hired by Mainland Stevedoring from the country's North Island. The unions

have made no attempt to establish common cause between both groups of workers in a fight for decent wages and conditions for all.

Prolonged strike at Fiji fish cannery ends

The eight-week long strike by 350 workers at the state-owned Pacific Fishing plant (PAFCO) in Levuka, Fiji, ended on September 24. The strikers, mainly indigenous women, decided to return to work after a meeting between PAFCO management, the Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC) and the Pacific Fishing Company Employees Union. The strike was over employees' demands for substantial improvements in wages, which are as low as \$US42 per month.

FTUC general secretary Senator Felix Anthony said after the two-day meeting: "We are happy that all of the outstanding issues of the workers were agreed to by the management, who seemed eager to see an end to the dispute."

Rank-and-file workers, however, were locked out of the negotiations and union representatives have refused give details about the agreement. The only information provided was that management would recognise an award ruling made in April this year stating that employees are entitled to wage increases. The court decision, however, does not specify an increase.

Fiji hospitality workers continue year-long campaign

Former employees of the Turtle Island Resort in Fiji are continuing to fight against their dismissal in June 2002 for joining the National Union of Hospitality, Catering and Tourism Industries Employees (NUHCTIE).

Turtle Island Resort is a five-star holiday resort in Fiji's Yasawa group of islands. It employs 172 workers. Workers allege that management sacked 23 employees in March 2000 and another 44 in 2002 because they had joined the union. Although the owner denies the charge, he has failed to provide any other explanation for the dismissals and has refused to reinstate the workers. According to the NUHCTIE, new recruits who agreed not to join the union replaced the sacked workers.

Over the past month, unionists and former employees have circled the resort in boats, displaying placards demanding their reinstatement. The NUHCTIE general secretary said this week that workers were planning larger demonstrations and wanted global support for their campaign against the company.



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