Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

11 November 2006

Asia

Korean trainee representatives call off boycott

Representatives of trainee teachers from 11 universities met in Daegu in South Korea on November 7 and voted to call off a proposed boycott of exams scheduled for November 19.

The back-down comes after 10,000 trainee teachers rallied in central Seoul to protest against Education Ministry plans to cut the quota of new teachers to 4,339 next year from 6,585 this year. Trainees will boycott classes this week to protest the ministry's measures".

Strike ends without any real gains

Union members at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in South Korea voted to end their 215-day strike on November 7 without achieving their key demands. The strike, which began on April 6, was in opposition to the university's decision to withdraw from a collective agreement that gave the union the right to hire university employees.

The strike action shut down library service for students, trash remained uncollected and amenities were not cleaned. In an attempt to counter the industrial action university management encouraged volunteers and hired 20 part-time students to work in the library.

Sri Lankan pharmaceutical workers on strike

An indefinite strike by State Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Corporation employees in Sri Lanka entered its tenth day on November 8. The strikers are demanding the immediate reinstatement of two victimised union officials, both vice presidents of the union. Workers claim that the officials were dismissed without cause.

State Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Corporation Employees Association (SPMCEA) general secretary Anjana Nihara told the media that "the company tries to hunt our union leaders" and "wants to get rid of the unions from this institution". Management has attempted to maintain production and break the strike by recruiting 19 alternate workers who have no prior experience or training in the production of pharmaceuticals.

Sri Lankan teachers picket over conditions

Around 1,000 teachers picketed the Zone Educational Department in Pallimulla near the busy main bus stop in the southern city of Matara on November 8 in support of several demands. These include the immediate payment of salary arrears, the cancellation of unnecessary and arbitrary transfers, speedy promotions and the provision of salary increments.

On November 1, principals from state schools picketed the Western Province Chief Ministers Office demanding long-outstanding salary arrears. Police were deployed against the protestors and at least one principal was assaulted. The principals handed a memorandum containing their demands to the chief minister's office at the end of the campaign.

Sri Lankan pharmacists begin sick note campaign

Nearly 700 pharmacists in 20 state hospitals in Sri Lanka's central province held a sick note protest on November 6 to demand the rectification of salary anomalies and the immediate implementation of promotions delayed for nearly a decade.

The pharmacists have threatened to stage protests and call for support from co-workers across all state hospitals if their demands are not met by November 16. They are members of the Society of Government Pharmacists which has a national membership of 3,100.

Bank workers in Andhra Pradesh on indefinite strike

Around 174 workers at Kadapa District Cooperative Central Bank and 15 branches in Kadapa in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh launched an indefinite strike on November 2 over a series of demands. The strike paralysed banking operations across the district.

Their demands include the provision of interim relief payments and the processing of outstanding promotions. The strikers demonstrated and chanted slogans denouncing the government for the non-implementation of a range of conditions promised in the past. The workers are members of the Andhra Pradesh Cooperative Central Bank Employees Association.

State government workers demand permanency

Daily wage workers in Karnataka state government departments in India held a sit-down protest in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office in Shimoga on October 31. The protestors demanded permanency for 17,000 daily wage workers employed after July 1984.

Workers have threatened indefinite strike action if the government does not act on their demands. They are members of the Karnataka State Daily Wage Employees Federation.

Pakistani shipyard workers oppose union ban

Karachi shipyard workers went on strike and protested outside Karachi Press Club (KPC) on November 6 in protest over a management ban on employees involved in union activities.

Various trade unions and representatives from a range of community and social organisations joined the protest which was called by the Karachi Shipyard Workers Solidarity Committee.

Poisoned workers take legal action in China

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A total of 146 workers from two battery factories in Huizhou, southern China, who were found in August 2004 to be suffering job-related cadmium poisoning, are taking legal action for adequate compensation. Their court case, involving mostly women between the age of 20 and 30, began on November 3.

The poisoned employees allege that they were terminated after receiving little compensation and have claimed that factory owners, the Hong-Kong based Gold Peak Industries Ltd, breached the Prevention of Occupational Disease Law.

The company promised to arrange health checks for workers and to pay medical fees and living expenses in 2004 but failed to do so. This provoked a series of protests by the infected employees and supporters.

Most of the employees could not afford medical treatment and the poisoning made it extremely difficult for them to attend work. They want the company to pay for further medical tests, provide compensation for loss of wages and reemploy them in suitable jobs.

Australia and the Pacific

Disability workers strike

Disability service workers throughout southern Tasmania, Australia went on strike on November 8 claiming the state Labor government had refused to listen to their concerns about proposed changes to rosters. The workers, who are members of the Health and Community Services Union (HSUA), insist that the roster changes will result in cuts to take home pay and impact adversely on patient services.

A spokesperson for the HSUA said that management had been deliberately provocative by posting up the changed rosters even though they knew that the majority of workers opposed them and would react. The changes are a cost-cutting exercise to reduce the number of weekend staff and slash overtime.

Airport workers protest over safety and jobs

Qantas baggage handlers at the International terminal in Sydney walked off the job on November 6 over health and safety issues.

The workers, who are members of the Transport Workers Union, are concerned about a 50 percent rise in back injuries in the past eight months and believe the increase is related to increased workloads due to a 40 percent reduction in staff over the past 12 months. The union is currently in negotiation with management over staffing levels.

New Zealand radiographers strike after talks fail

Radiographers in New Zealand went on strike on November 9 after last-ditch negotiations between District Health Boards (DHBs) over pay parity demands broke down. The strike will continue for five days in Tairawhiti, nine days in Canterbury and ten days in Bay of Plenty, Lakes, Hutt Valley, Otago and Southland. X-rays, scans and related services will be severely affected forcing most hospitals to cancel elective surgery.

The Radiographers Union, representing 250 radiographers from seven health boards, rejected the DHBs' latest offer which gave parity with counterparts in 14 other health boards, but not until October next year. The pay disparity in some cases is as high as $NZ6,000 ($US3,840) per annum.

Meanwhile, 1,400 medical laboratory scientists are considering industrial action after rejecting the latest pay offer from the New Zealand Blood Service and 16 DHBs.

TVNZ staff step up strike action

On November 7, staff at the state-owned TV New Zealand (TVNZ), including presenters, technicians, security guards, and camera operators, walked off the job for the third time in four days. The one-hour strike disturbed all live-to-air crosses from abroad.

The 300 workers, members of the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU) and the Public Service Association (PSU), have carried out lightning strikes over the past week in support of a 5 percent wage claim, additional annual leave and a single national agreement for TVNZ employees in Wellington and Auckland.

TVNZ latest wage offer is only 2.5 percent with potential for up to 1.5 percent more, but this will be based on individual performance. Members met just prior to striking and voted overwhelmingly to continue and escalate industrial action to secure a better deal.

The unions have asked TVNZ management to return to the negotiating table but have received no response.

Hotel worker sacked for being pregnant

The Unite Union has called a protest for November 12 outside the Gateway Hotel in South Auckland, New Zealand. The union is protesting the sacking of worker Nora Ulutui because she was pregnant. When new management took over the hotel Ulutui was told that her pregnancy was a "liability" and she no longer had a job. The union is taking the case to the Human Rights Commission.

University staff strike over pay

Members of the National Academic Staff Association (NASA) of the University of Technology (Unitech) in Lae, Papua New Guinea began an indefinite strike on November 6 over an outstanding domestic market allowance (DMA).

Following conflicting statements and broken promises from Unitech to pay the allowance, NASA called off negotiations accusing management of being incapable of managing the university.

NASA president Michael Hasagama said Unitech has been ordered by the Industrial Registrar to pursue the case through the courts so the union did not see any reason to continue negotiations.

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