

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

20 January 2007

Striking workers picket Nestlé factory

More than 600 workers and their families began an indefinite picket of Nestlé's Cabuyao Plant in Laguna in the Philippines on January 14. Fifty police were mobilised to negotiate an end to the protest. The picket marked the fifth anniversary of strike action by Nestlé workers.

Union of Filipino Employees-Drug, Food and Allied Industries Union (UFE-DFA-KMU) members walked out in January 2002 when Nestlé management refused to include a retirement benefits provision in a collective bargaining agreement (CBA). Many employees were sacked after they defied an order by Secretary of Labor Patricia Sto Thomas to end their protest and return to work.

There have been many clashes with police and workers have been threatened during the protracted strike. Union president Diasdado Fortuna was assassinated by unknown assailants while on his way home from a picket at the factory on September 22, 2005.

This month's picket was established to force the company into implementing a Supreme Court order issued in August 2006 stating that retirement benefits were a valid CBA item and directing the union and management to return to the negotiating table.

Hyundai union calls off industrial action

Union leaders at Hyundai Motors in South Korea have called off strike action and agreed to defer full payment of an annual year bonus until production targets are met. The deal came after three weeks of industrial action over Hyundai's refusal last December to pay the remaining third of the bonus.

Union officials claimed that they were not consulted about the bonus cut and Hyundai workers began four-hour rolling strikes on January 15. On the same day police announced that they planned to charge union leader Park Yu-ki with the alleged assault of a leading Hyundai Motor company executive at a New Year's ceremony on January 4.

Arrest warrants were issued for Park and two other union officials on January 16 and followed government threats that it would "crack down hard" on the union if the strikes went ahead. On January 10, hundreds of riot police were

mobilised against protesting Hyundai workers and their supporters outside the company's headquarters.

Overtime bans imposed on December 28, which cut production by 18,000 vehicles, have now been lifted. While Hyundai is suing union leaders, the union is taking legal action against the company for breaching agreements.

Kashmiri cement workers demonstrate

Wuyan Cement Factory employees in Srinagar, in the north Indian state of Kashmir, demonstrated in the city on January 10 to secure three months' unpaid salaries and other claims. While Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad promised last month that the outstanding salaries would be paid, workers have not received any payment.

Other demands by cement workers include modernisation of the plant, payment of six-year's outstanding provident fund contributions and an end to salary anomalies within the industry. The workers also want the government to increase financial support for the factory.

Indian health workers demand wages

Contract health workers from the Government Medical College and General Hospital in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh demonstrated on January 10 to demand the immediate payment of six month's outstanding wages.

Workers claim that the director of medical education was told on numerous occasions about the hardship caused by the unpaid wages but that authorities had ignored the issue. The demonstration was organised by Anantapuram Medical College and Hospital Employees Union.

Indian transport workers protest insurance increase

Auto-rickshaw and transport workers in the Indian state of Puducherry demonstrated outside general insurance companies on January 10 over a recent increase in motor insurance premiums. The demonstrators demanded immediate withdrawal of the price rise.

The demonstration was organised by the joint action committee of trade unions comprising of the Mini Load Carriers Workers Unions, Labor Democratic Front, and the Kamaraj Auto Workers Union. Workers have foreshadowed a strike if their demand is not met.

Sri Lankan health workers protest

Sri Lankan health workers protested on January 17 over health ministry delays in resolving outstanding work-related problems. The main protest was held outside the Colombo National Hospital and within sight of the ministry.

Auxiliary health workers are still without uniforms despite government promises to provide them four years ago. The Health Ministry is also planning to increase the price of meals presently provided at low cost to auxiliary workers.

Massive salary anomalies exist across all grades despite a government circular directing the health ministry to rectify the problem. The ministry also promised to pay eight months outstanding overtime and leave entitlements but this has not occurred. Moreover, a system allowing government workers to take out stress loans has been curtailed. The protests were organised by the All Ceylon Health Service Union.

Transport workers demonstrate over riot police assault

Sri Lanka Transport Board (CTB) workers demonstrated outside the busy Fort Railway Station in central Colombo on January 11 in protest against a riot police and goon squad attack on a picket two days earlier over the non-payment of salary arrears. Four union leaders were arrested during the police assault.

The workers want compensation and duty leave for six workers badly injured and hospitalised in the attack and have threatened to strike on February 2, along with port, railways, banks, petroleum and power employees, if their demands are not met by January 31.

Aged-care workers in Western Australia strike

Over 100 aged-care workers from Amaroo in Perth went on strike on January 16 to demand a wage rise. The workers, members of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union, want a \$1 per hour increase. The strike action occurred during bargaining for a new enterprise work agreement. Negotiations have dragged on for four months.

A first-year age-care worker at Amaroo is currently paid \$14.84 an hour. The company has offered a 70-cent per hour increase, claiming that it had to cut staff to pay this amount. Employees have rejected this, pointing out that Amaroo is planning to build a \$7 million retirement village in the Western Australian coastal town of Denmark. They have placed bans on overtime, paperwork and cleaning administration areas.

Agreement reached in NZ radiation therapists' pay dispute

Scheduled strikes by New Zealand radiation therapists were cancelled this week, after a settlement was reached in pay talks between the Apex union and District Health Boards (DHBs). The therapists began a series of rolling stoppages on January 10 as part of a nine-month struggle for a 6 percent cost-of-living adjustment. Therapists in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Palmerston North

walked out last week while those in Auckland and Wellington had planned to strike again on January 15.

To reach settlement the DHBs increased their pay offer and the union agreed to extend the time the agreement covers. The deal, however, falls short of the workers' demands. The new package includes a 1 percent rise backdated to April last year, another 1.5 percent backdated to October and a further 2.5 percent from July this year, on top of some step increases. The DHBs said their original offer amounted to 5.5 percent over two years but the union claimed it was only a 1.4 percent increase on the base rate.

Meanwhile, the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS) representing more than 2,500 senior doctors is about to begin mediation talks. The ASMS has been in negotiations with DHBs since last May for a national agreement that expired in June."

Radiographers, service workers and laboratory workers are also in contract negotiations and some have already taken strike action. Nurses have begun negotiations to ensure the conditions they won just over a year ago are not eroded. The union representing junior doctors will re-enter negotiations in April having reached a temporary agreement just two months ago.

Twenty-four walkout by Ramu contract employees

Indigenous contract workers at the Ramu nickel mine project in Basamak in Papua New Guinea's Madang province, held a 24-hour strike on January 8 over low wages, poor working conditions and the lack of safety equipment. The strike ended after workers met with Ramu NiCo Management Limited, a subsidiary of China Metallurgical Construction Company (CMCC).

Contract employees are only paid five kina day. This is far less than other site workers who receive 15 kina (\$US5.00). While CMCC management claims to have reached an understanding acceptable to the workers, details of the arrangement are not yet known.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact