

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

23 June 2007

## **Philippines electronics workers protest victimisations**

Chiyoda Integre Philippines Incorporated employees from the Light Industries and Science Park economic export zone in Laguna (near Manila) demonstrated outside the plant on June 19 over the sacking of all 68 union members at the factory.

Management of the Japanese-owned electronics plant charged the sacked workers with “inciting or participating in riots, disorders, illegal strikes or concerted actions to the company interests”. Prior to the sackings, employees were seeking negotiations for a collective bargaining agreement.

The dismissals followed the hiring of two military personnel, who, according to union president Felimon Alfiler, “roam around the production line holding shotguns and keeping an obvious eye on the most active union members.” Alfiler alleges that he had received anonymous death threats and was frequently followed by motorcyclists from the factory to his home.

While employees won the right to form a union (Talim-Chiyoda-Independent) in February this year, murder and intimidation of union activists in the Philippines is common.

According to the labour group Kalusang Mayo Uno (KMU), 86 trade unionists and labor advocates have been killed under the Arroyo administration. The latest killing was Renato “Atong” Pacayde, 45, who died from shotgun wounds to the head from two men on a passing motorcycle in southern Digos City.

## **Further wildcat strikes in Vietnam**

Over 800 workers at Top Royal Flash Limited, a Taiwanese-owned garment factory in Ho Chi Minh City, struck on June 13 over excessive overtime and the company’s failure to deposit social insurance deductions.

Workers complained they were forced to do overtime for five days every week over the past four months and that while the company had been deducting part of their salaries for social insurance during the past six months it had failed to send the contributions to the authorities.

Employees returned to work after intervention by the city’s labour department. During mediation the company director promised to pay around \$US74,000 into social insurance and to reach agreement with the workers on overtime.

## **Indonesian workers protest over outsourcing**

Hundreds of Force Labor Alliance members rallied at the Cakung Bonded Zone in North Jakarta on June 17 to demand the government scrap recently introduced outsourcing and contract systems. Alliance coordinator said that the new systems adversely affected wages and income and caused employment uncertainty.

Under the current Labor Law, companies can outsource their workforce to cut administration costs. Workers claim the law was introduced to reduce labor costs and avoid paying severance pay and additional annual bonuses.

## **Indonesian hotel workers rally for severance pay**

Hundreds of former employees of Hotel Indonesia and the now defunct Hotel Inna Wisata who were laid off three years ago rallied outside the Grand Indonesia business complex in Central Jakarta on June 14 to demand severance pay.

The hotels laid off more than a thousand employees in 2004 to make way for the Grand Indonesia business complex, but did not pay an agreed severance package. In 2006 the workers reported the case to the Jakarta Manpower Agency, which supported their claim and ordered the company to pay out 10 billion rupiah (\$US1.1 million).

PT Hotel Indonesia failed to pay up and so workers took their case to the Central Jakarta District Court which ruled in April that the money be disbursed by June 14. The company, however, only paid 3.7 billion rupiah.

## **Taiwan train drivers threaten industrial action**

Unionised train drivers at the Taiwan Railway Administration (TRA) have threatened to boycott trains equipped with a new Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system. Drivers claim that ATP, which is designed to stop trains exceeding speed limits, is prone to failure and becomes ineffective or jams suddenly stalling trains. It is common for drivers who experience failures while driving to turn the system off.

The drivers protested to the TRA on June 17, after one of their colleagues was found responsible for causing a train accident at Tali station in Lin Chung-liang that killed seven people two days earlier. The driver had disconnected the ATP system just prior to the accident. Drivers want the TRA to resume the “old practice” of assigning two drivers to each train to cope with further failures.

Despite the dangers, the TRA, which has indicated that it will not fix the fault, has struck a deal with the system supplier to limit overall malfunctions to no more than 18 times in any given day.

## **Indian port workers hold national day of action**

Port and dockworkers at Kochi Port in Kerala demonstrated and held a public meeting as part of a national day of action at major Indian ports on June 19. The Water Transport Workers Federation of India members organised the protest.

The campaign is in support of demands for a bonus for all port employees as part of their monthly salary and in opposition to government proposals for 10-year wage agreements. Workers want

agreements renegotiated every five years. Other demands include, an end to a freeze on recruitment and retainment of employees until 60 years of age.

#### **Indian child care workers demonstrate**

On June 18, hundreds of childcare (anganawadi) workers and assistants in the Indian State of Karnataka marched from the Mysore town hall to the Zilla Panchayat (village council) premises over a number of outstanding demands.

These include, regularisation of employment, provision of gratuity and pensions after retirement, payment of official minimum wages, the provision of kerosene or LPG for cooking and a 500-rupee (\$US11) rent allowance increase. Workers submitted their demands to the Mysore Zilla Panchayat chief executive officer after the demonstration.

According to the Federation of Karnataka State Anganawadi Workers and Assistants about 1.8 million unorganised anganawadi workers and assistants are working without basic amenities at their workplaces.

#### **Indian weavers end strike**

Unions representing power loom weavers in the town of Sircilla in the Karimnagar region of Andhra Pradesh ended a 10-day strike over wages on June 15 after loom owners agreed to an increase.

The wage settlement, however, was 18.5 paise (\$US cents 0.4) per 10 pics of cotton cloth, up 2.5 paise on the past rate but below the 22 paise sought by the weavers. There are around 15,000 weavers across the state and another 5,000 employed in allied industries such as sizing, warping and dyeing.

In a separate dispute, government nurses staged a sit-down protest on RIMS hospital premises in Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh on June 19 demanding the cancellation of what they deemed to be “irregular” promotions. They want the granting of fresh promotions.

#### **Sri Lankan zoological workers demand pay increase**

Workers at the Dehiwala Zoological Gardens on the outskirts of Colombo picketed the zoo on June 15 to demand a salary increase and the payment of allowance arrears and other benefits. The protest was called by the “Committee to Protect the Zoo” after negotiations with the management failed to solve the issues.

#### **South Australian psychiatrists oppose staff shortages**

About 50 psychiatrists employed in public hospitals in Adelaide, South Australia (SA) held a stop-work meeting on June 18 to protest staff shortages. The Salaried Medical Officers Association claims that many professional workers in the state public hospital system are threatening to resign over workloads and poor conditions.

The meeting demanded that the state Labor government hire 15 additional psychiatrists, enhance working conditions and improve patient care. The government has refused to negotiate with the Association for up to 18 months and is attempting to delay the issue further by seeking to put it before an Industrial Relations Commission hearing on June 19.

#### **Strikes at Air New Zealand link company**

Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union members (EPMU) at Air Nelson went on strike for four days on June 21 after rejecting the company’s latest pay offer. The strike involved engineering and flight support staff.

Workers want a two-year contract with consecutive pay rises of 5.8 and 4.8 percent. The airline has only offered an average of 3.6 percent a year for the first two-and-a-half years and a 3 percent per year increase under a productivity deal.

On June 15, the Employment Court granted an injunction sought by the EPMU preventing Air Nelson from using Air New Zealand managers and employees to load aircraft and perform other tasks that would normally be done by striking workers. Air Nelson, a fully owned subsidiary of Air New Zealand, operates services between New Zealand’s main cities and regional centres.

#### **Cleaners protest against poor pay and conditions**

Cleaners in Auckland and Wellington held rallies and marches on June 15 as part of an international “Fair Deal for Cleaners” campaign. The New Zealand protests targeted Spotless, a multinational cleaning firm considered to be the worst employer in the local cleaning industry.

Cleaner Sue Lafaele said she had been in the job 30 years but receives a little over \$11 an hour. Mother of six Maria Fatu has been cleaning for eight years and has two jobs to make ends meet. Her working day starts at 5 a.m., when her children are still in bed, and has no time to spend with them after finishing at night.

#### **French Polynesia hotel workers continue strikes**

Workers at Accor-owned Sofitel hotels on the French Polynesia resort island of Moorea are continuing a prolonged strike over pay and conditions. An attempt last week by employers, backed by the minister of transport, to restart negotiations failed when union delegates refused to attend.

Eighty percent of Tahiti Resort employees are on strike and 70 percent at the Sofitel Moorea Beach Resort. Police were previously called to the Sofitel Moorea Beach Resort to remove strikers. Workers had also blockaded the entrance of the Sofitel Tahiti Resort using wooden pallets and metal barriers. The company is now threatening to close the hotels.



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