Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

27 October 2007

Asia

Government bus drivers demonstrate in Indonesia

On October 23, hundreds of employees of the state-owned bus company Perusahaan PengangKutan Djakarta (PPD) rallied outside the company's JI Panjaitan headquarters in East Jakarta demanding unpaid salaries. One protester claimed that many workers had not been paid since June. Workers plan to maintain the picket until they are paid.

PDD employs around 2,500 staff and has a history of delaying wage payments. In July 2006, PDD employees, after enduring nine months without pay, went on strike and drove buses into the centre of Jakarta causing a massive traffic jam. In April this year, they held a rally in front of the State Palace forcing the company to pay outstanding wages.

PDD has faced financial difficulties since 2001, when the government stopped subsidies in order to force the company to shed staff in preparation for privatisation.

Indonesian workers protest factory closures

On October 25, over 2,000 workers protested in front of the Japanese embassy in Jakarta against the closure of three Japanese-owned factories on the outskirts of the city. The protesters held banners declaring: "Halt the closure of factories and the massive dismissal of workers".

The factories involved—PT PEDIDA and PT MTPDI—are owned by Panasonic and PT Negi of Nippon Glass respectively and employ in total about 2,400 workers. Neither company has provided a reason for the closures.

Striking West Timor school teachers win allowance increase

On October 22, 5,000 striking school teachers, in Kupang, on the western tip of Timor, ended a one-day strike after the Kupang Legislative Council agreed to pay increased work allowances. The strike forced the closure of all schools, both public and private.

The teachers struck in the morning and rallied in front of the Kupang Legislative Council. They were prevented from entering the building by hundreds of police but later broke down a perimeter gate and entered the plenary hall. They took over the speaker's chair and put their demands to council legislators.

After rowdy arguments between protestors and legislators, the Council agreed to raise teachers' monthly allowance from 200,000 rupiah to 450,000 rupiah ($US50).

Philippines garment workers rally

On October 22, around 800 workers from lingerie manufacturer Triumph International Philippines Incorporation, demonstrated outside the company's sales office in Makati City against management breaches of a collective bargaining agreement and the hiring of temporary instead of full-time employees. The workers, members of the union Bagong Pagkakaisa ng mga Manggagawa sa Triumph International, marched through the city wearing red and black shirts and ribbons.

The company hired 180 temporary workers in August who will only be employed for four to six months. At the same it is preparing to retrench permanent employees.

Taiwan transport workers vote to strike

Around 200 employees from transport companies Shuttle and Famous Express rallied in Hsinchu on October 21 and voted to strike at the end of the month. The two companies handle about 60 percent of the shipping business in the Hsinchu Science Park, the Central Taiwan Science Park and the Southern Taiwan Science Park.

The workers are seeking seven demands, which include the recognition of the union, a reduction in the outsourcing of work, protection for workers' rights and negotiation procedures for labour disputes.

For several years, the companies have been cutting costs by outsourcing work to other transport companies, claiming this is necessary due to reduced demand as manufacturers move operations to mainland China.

Indian Skoda workers demand pay revision

Around 100 workers at Skoda Auto India's Aurangabad facility near Mumbai struck on October 22 to demand a pay revision. The facility produces the Audi A6 and Volkswagen Passat and is scheduled to turn out the Fabia mid-size sedan model.

The company want workers to maintain the same output even after laying off casual employees. Vehicle production had increased by 50 percent over the last six months. When the casuals were laid off, output production fell to earlier levels. Management reacted by cutting permanent workers' wages and by suspending nine employees, including union officials and union activists.

Indian power loom workers seek bonus rise

Power loom weaving workers in Marulaiyampalayam village near Salem in Tamil Nadu went on strike on October 22 to demand a bonus increase from 10 to 15 percent.

Workers say that more than 120 families in the village are dependent on income from the power loom units. They submitted a petition to district officials calling on the district administration to direct unit managers to implement a bonus increase.

In a separate dispute, round 300 head-load workers in Erode, Tamil Nadu went on strike and demonstrated outside the municipal office on October 23. They demanded the government provide a separate welfare board to deal with their needs. The strike brought all movement of goods to a standstill. The protest was organised by the Erode District All Head Load Workers Central Association.

Irrigation workers demand wage rise

© World Socialist Web Site

On October 22, daily wage and contract workers from the Upper Tunga Project in Shimoga in the south Indian state of Karnataka marched and held a sit-down protest for immediate payment of a wage rise increase outstanding for seven months.

Other demands included, re-employment of retrenched workers and an undertaking that daily wage and contract workers in the Upper Bhadra Project would not be laid off. Workers plan further action if their demands are not met.

Sri Lankan health workers over pay

Around 400 health workers, including minor staff and nurses, in rural hospitals in the Kahawatte, Balangoda and Embiliptiya and Sabaragamuwa provinces went on strike on October 16 for overtime payments outstanding from January 2007.

Workers at the base hospital in Badulla also struck on the same day over the non-payment of overtime and picketed the facility. Around 12 workers climbed to the top of the hospital's 80 foot water-tank to display placards. Staff at both hospitals can be required to work 60 hours overtime per month. While strikers made arrangements to provide emergency care, all other activities, including food preparations for the patients, came to a halt.

On the same day, all health workers at the Auyrvedic (indigenous) Hospital in Colombo picketed the hospital for a salary increase to cope with escalating cost of living (COL) and repayment of a COL allowance that had been withdrawn.

In a separate dispute, 12 senior tax collectors at the Revenue Department of the North Western Province in Kurunegala began a hunger strike on October 17 over promotions outstanding over the two years.

Australia and the Pacific

Victorian nurses end industrial action

On October 25, public sector nurses in Victoria voted to accept a pay and conditions deal ending a nine-day industrial dispute. Work bans closed around 1,200 beds and caused the cancellation of at least 800 elective surgeries.

Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) state secretary Lisa Fitzpatrick claimed that nurses had "achieved very close to what we set out to achieve for the bulk of our nursing workforce." But the deal brokered by the ANF is below the 6 percent annually over three years nurses were seeking and is below cost of living increases. Dependent on classifications, some nurses will get up to 6 percent but this will be tied to productivity gains.

While the Victorian state Labor government dropped its demand for the abolition of nurse-patient ratios and promised an extra 500 nursing staff, the deal allows management greater flexibility in rostering staff, including the introduction of split shifts.

On October 23, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, on the urging of the state government, ordered the lifting of work bans under Section 496 of the Howard government's WorkChoices laws threatening individual fines of more than $6,000.

Tasmanian nurses protest over wages and conditions

More than 200 public hospital nurses rallied outside the Royal Hobart Hospital on October 24 and voted unanimously to extend work bans that had been in place for two weeks. Australian Nursing Federation members are unsatisfied with the Labor state government's offer of a 10.5 percent wage rise over three years. The government also wants changes to staffing formulas and the use of untrained staff in hospital wards.

An ANF spokesperson said that nurses were expected to do 17-hour straight shifts which place both nurses and patients at risk. She claimed that Tasmanian nurses are the lowest paid nationally.

Statistics New Zealand staff hold more rallies

Staff at Statistics NZ held further rallies as part of a campaign for the right to negotiate pay. The company, contrary to the government's bargaining parameters, insists it will determine pay rates.

More than 170 Pubic Service Association members held lunchtime rallies and other activities earlier this month. Last week, they protested near Statistics NZ's head office in Wellington while staff in Christchurch also held a roadside rally. The campaign involves more than 540 staff across the country. The workers banned all overtime on September 30 and field interviewers have stopped providing information to the department.

The workers also want the retention of extra leave for long serving personal. They are demanding that field interviewers, be paid the same rate as office-based staff who interview by phone. Field interviewers, who are on a separate collective agreement, are paid between $3.18 to $4.40 less than their office-based colleagues.

Waterside workers strike again at Ports of Auckland

Waterside workers at the Ports of Auckland went on strike for the fourth time on October 22 as part of their campaign of limited industrial action over wages. The stoppage involved about 250 members of the Maritime Union of New Zealand. The workers are seeking a 4.5 to 4.9 percent pay rise but the port company has only offered 3.25 percent which they are currently paying into workers' bank accounts without authorisation.

Workers and family members picketed the port gates and handed out information on the dispute. A union spokesman described the 3.25-hour stoppage strike action as "symbolic". The union has suspended further industrial action and continued this week to participate in bargaining overseen by an Employment Relations Authority facilitator.

NZ teachers consider industrial action

New Zealand primary school teachers may take industrial action after pay talks with the Education Ministry stalled. The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) adjourned talks with the ministry this week and is presently consulting union members on what will be the next step. The union claims the sticking point was not over a basic pay increase but the lack of financial rewards for teachers who take on extra responsibilities.

The teachers' claim, lodged with the ministry in June, includes provision for management salary units. A union spokesman said without such allowances there is "little incentive to accept extra responsibility on top of a heavy workload". The ministry had offered an extra 2,000 units. The union claims the offer, which is less than one unit per primary school, was inadequate.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site