

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

3 November 2007

## Asia

### **Korean electricians clash with riot police**

Around 400 striking members of the Korean Construction Workers Union (KCWU) clashed with riot police attempting to break up a rally on October 27 outside the Youngjin Electrical Company headquarters in Seoul. One worker, 48-year-old Jung Hae Jin, set himself on fire during the confrontation and later died.

The rally was in support of a 113-day strike by the Incheon Electricians branch, who struck on June 19, after the repeated refusals by the Youngjin Electrical Company to negotiate a collective work agreement with the union.

Workers' demands include union recognition, limiting of the working week to 44 hours, improved safety conditions and an end to illegal contracting out. One construction worker at the rally said: "We work 12 to 13 hours a day without being treated as a human beings."

### **Indian health workers protest privatisation**

Health workers at the government maternity hospital in Ongole in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh held a sit-down protest (dharna) on October 27 against the division of the Health Department into three parts. Workers fear that the government proposal is to prepare the way for privatisation of state health services.

They also claim that the change will affect promotion opportunities and limit transfer options. Currently workers can opt to work in primary health centres, district hospitals or teaching hospitals. The protest was called by the United Medical and Health Employees Union.

### **Indian railway workers strike over transfers**

Around 600 Palakkad Railway Division employees in the southern state of Kerala stopped work on October 26 in protest against management moves to transfer 200 employees from Palakkad to the new Salem Railway

Division office. The workers also protested for one hour at the Olavakkode division office, where a delegation met with Railway Divisional Manager A.K. Harith.

### **Teachers and bank workers strike in Tamilnadu**

Tamilnadu primary school teachers demonstrated in Chennai on October 25. They were demanding a ratio of one teacher to 30 students at the elementary level and at least three teachers assigned to take five class periods, instead of the current ratio of two to five classes. The teachers are members of the Tamilnadu Primary School Teachers' Association.

In a separate dispute, about 70 employees from 12 branches of the Nilgiris District Central Cooperative Bank (NCCB), the Primary Cooperative Agricultural and Rural Development Bank (PCARD) in Udhamandalam struck on October 24. They want a wage revision, promotions, disbursement of retirement benefits, the filling of vacancies and the provision of refinance facilities. The workers are members of the Nilgiris District Central Cooperative Bank Employees Association.

### **Pakistani power workers demonstrate against privatisation policy**

Hundreds of Hyderabad Electric Supply Company (Hesco) employees demonstrated across Sindh province on October 23 against the proposed bifurcation and privatisation of the Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda).

They also opposed growing joblessness and price hikes and demanded that the company cease deducting Eid (festival) bonuses from salaries. The workers have served notice that they would strike if the authority did not match pay-scales of all non-clerical workers with clerical staff.

Hesco workers in Hyderabad marched from Labor Hall to the press club. There were also demonstrations

in Shikarpur and Nawabshah. The Wapda Hydro Electric Central Labor Union organised the campaign.

### **Pakistani sugar mill workers demand overdue salaries**

Dadu Sugar Mills employees demonstrated on October 22 over management failure to release the salaries of 300 employees transferred over the last five months. The workers claim that the withholding of salaries has prevented their families from celebrating the Eid festival. They have appealed to the Sindh province chief minister to intervene.

### **Sri Lankan health workers on strike**

Thousands of health workers struck on October 31 to protest the suspension of overtime and rostered-off payments since September. They are also demanding a 2 percent pay increase owing since January 2004, an end to transfers without consent and the amalgamation of health management services with the Combined Services.

The demonstrators, mainly para-medics and clerical workers, are employed in major Sri Lankan hospitals, including in Colombo, Kandy, Peradeniya, Ratnapura, Badulla, Matara, Hambantota, Gampola, Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa.

The strike was called by the Health Services Trade Union Alliance which represents about 70 trade unions in the health sector. Further industrial action is planned if authorities do not respond to workers' demands.

### **Australia and the Pacific**

#### **Tasmanian public hospital nurses vote to escalate work bans**

About 500 nurses employed in Tasmania's public hospitals marched from the Royal Hobart Hospital and to the state parliament on October 31. Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) members voted to reject the Labor government's pay offer of 10.5 percent over three years and resolved to step up work bans initiated three weeks earlier.

Increased industrial action will result in the closure of one in five beds in public hospitals across the state from November 5 and the postponement of elective surgery, except category one, cardiac, cancer and caesarean births. Nurses will also impose a 48-hour ban from November 6 on overtime and double shifts in all wards, including intensive care and neonatal intensive care.

The nurses want equal pay with interstate colleagues,

retention of staffing levels and the exclusion of non-nursing staff from nursing roles. They are also protesting long working hours with many expected to do 17-hour straight shifts.

### **Carpenters picket Australian joinery factory**

Sacked workers from kitchen manufacturer Barnsley Joinery Work began an indefinite picket of the Newcastle outer-suburban factory on October 29. They are demanding payment of outstanding wages and allowances. The 18 workers were sacked that morning and given 20 minutes to get their personal belongings together and leave the premises.

Factory management sacked the carpenters, claiming that recent storm damage had cost the company eight weeks of production. About 60 workers are still employed at the company. A Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union organiser said workers are owed between \$8,000 and \$30,000 in pay and allowances. The sacked workers were only given two days' pay.

While the union applied to the Industrial Relations Commission for a hearing the court delayed it for one week after the company claimed it needed more time to prepare its case.

### **Partial return to work in New Caledonia cement strike**

Construction projects have resumed in New Caledonia following a partial return to work last week by workers at the country's only cement factory. A month-long strike over pay by 14 workers at the Holcim cement plant brought the territory's construction industry to a near standstill.

A spokesman for the Union of Kanak and Exploited Workers (USTKE) said that although industrial action would continue during daylight hours, employees were reporting for the night shift at the plant. The USTKE also said it had released 2,000 tonnes of cement because many construction workers had been stood down because of the strike. The union has made these concessions even though negotiations with Holcim remain deadlocked.



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