

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

15 March 2008

Indian airport employees strike over privatisation

Airport Authority of India (AAI) workers began an indefinite strike on March 11 in protest over government plans to privatise the Hyderabad and Bangalore airports.

Some 14,000 airport service employees, including cleaning, sanitary, fire services and electricians, joined the strike after talks between the government, AAI and union representatives collapsed.

The government has deployed air force personnel to airports and outsourced cleaning and sanitary services to counter the walkout. At the same time, it is threatening to evoke the strike-breaking Essential Services Management Act if the industrial action continues.

Praful Patel, the minister responsible for civil aviation, has insisted that the government will proceed with the privatisation in accordance with an agreement it signed with private companies in 2004.

IPK workers demand job permanency

On March 11, nearly 2,000 Indira Kranthi Patham employees in Warangal, Andhara Pradesh, walked out demanding job permanency.

According to an IKP Employees Welfare Association spokesman, workers have been with the company for five years as casuals. The workers plan to intensify the industrial campaign if their demand is not met.

Police arrest ministerial workers

Police arrested around 150 striking ministerial office staff protesting outside a ministerial building in Pondicherry, India on March 11.

The workers had been on strike for one week to demand all existing staff vacancies be filled. They claim there are more than 500 vacancies and that the situation has been allowed to continue for several years. The strike was called by the Pondicherry State Unified Ministerial Action Committee.

Nepal communication workers continue strike

Part-time and temporary communication workers at United Telecom Limited in Nepal have been on strike for

more than one month with no end in sight.

The United Telecom Workers Union walked off the job on February 11 to demand full-time employee status but the company, which employs few permanent staff, refuses to budge. The strikers have occupied several of the company's offices and vowed to continue the strike action until they achieve their demand.

The company is a joint Indian-Nepal project. The main Indian companies in UTL are MSNL (Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd), VSNL (Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd) and Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd. The Nepalese partner is Nepal Venture.

Sri Lankan workers protest attacks on broadcasting personal

Sri Lanka Rupavahini Cooperation (SLRC) employees demonstrated outside the premises of the government-run television company on March 11. They were protesting over attacks on a number of the station's personnel.

Around 600 people, including SLRC employees, some public sector union representatives, opposition parties and civil rights organisations, participated in the demonstration, which was called by the Movement Against Suppression of Media.

The protest campaign was launched after an SLRC news director was assaulted in his office on December 27 last year. The thug attack was led by Labour Deputy Minister Mervin Silva, a member of Sri Lanka's Rajapakse government.

Several SLRC employees, including journalists, a librarian and a female deputy news director, have been physically attacked since then. The journalists were involved in covering a spontaneous protest over Silva's December attack.

Spokesman for five media organisations, Sanath Balasuriya said, "The fact that no police action has been taken against Minister Mervin Silva and his supporters makes us disbelieve that these incidents are the result of personal disputes." Silva has resigned from his non-

cabinet ministerial post and his parliamentary seat.

Police attack picketing workers in South Korea

On March 11, 150 company-hired thugs supported by 600 riot police attacked and broke up a picket of striking workers at the Korea Securities Computer Corporation.

The workers, who have been on strike for 182 days, began picketing the company's headquarters in Yeouido, Seoul, in mid-February. They want better working conditions, pay and regular contracts for irregular (casual) workers.

Foreign workers in Japan rally for better conditions

Hundreds of foreign workers rallied in Miyashita Park, Tokyo, on March 9 to call for "proper and equal treatment with Japanese workers".

Louis Carlet, deputy general secretary of the National Union of General Workers Tokyo Nambi, said foreign workers had no job security and lacked equal access to social security programs such as pensions and health care.

In 2006 there were over two million foreign residents or less than 1.6 percent of Japan's overall population. Most of these are immigrant workers who are employed in some of the worst paying and menial jobs, such as garbage collection and street cleaning.

Health professionals to strike over pay deal

Over 5,000 health professionals in Victoria's public intensive care units have voted to take industrial action during the Easter weekend over a new enterprise bargaining agreement. The strike will close 68 of the state's largest health services.

The health workers, including physiotherapists, speech pathologists and radiation therapists, have rejected a 3.25 percent government pay rise. The state Labor government wants the Health Services Union (HSU) to impose productivity trade offs in exchange for anything above the 3.25 pay offer and has refused to improve career structures for allied health professionals.

An HSU spokesperson told the media that hospital admissions would be crippled because there would be no tests or treatment available. "When an ambulance shows up you can't admit a patient without an X-ray being available, you can't intubate them and you can't operate on them," she said.

Australian public hospital doctors reject wage offer

Public hospital doctors in South Australia held a stop-work meeting on March 11 and rejected the state government's latest pay offer. The doctors, who are members of the Salaried Medical Officers Association (MOA), extended what was to be a morning stoppage until 6 p.m. causing elective surgery to be cancelled until

the following day.

An MOA spokesperson said that the doctors would continue negotiations with the government for two weeks but have threatened further strike action if there is no improved pay offer.

Fiji local government workers vote to strike

Workers at the Lautoka City Council this week voted in a secret ballot to strike on March 28 over an outstanding annual pay increment.

Fiji Local Government Officers Association president Rouhit Singh said that staff had a longstanding agreement with the council that they would be paid an annual pay increment. He said that the council told the union that it had made no provision in its 2008 budget for the payment.

Ok Tedi miners strike

Over 300 workers at Ok Tedi, Papua New Guinea's largest gold and copper mine, remain on strike after walking out on March 11. The strikers, who make up 96 percent of the workforce, want a 100 percent pay rise in line with an increase granted to expatriate employees. They are also demanding payment of a promised 2007 yearly bonus. The 2006 bonus was 14,000 kina (\$US5,000).

The Ok Tedi mine accounts for around 10 percent of the impoverished South Pacific nation's gross national product and 20 percent of its total exports. Last year Ok Tedi mine workers produced over 169,000 tonnes of copper concentrate and almost half million ounces of gold.

PNG Industrial Registrar Helen Saleu is meeting with mine management and the Ok Tedi Mining and Allied Workers Union in an attempt to resolve the dispute. The company claims that the strike is illegal but union spokesman Jackson Pinen told the media that mine will not return until Ok Tedi increases workers' pay by an additional \$US10,000.



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