

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

10 May 2008

Indonesian airport workers demand action on agreement

Flights at five Indonesian domestic airports were seriously disrupted on May 7 when an estimated 2,000 employees of the state-owned airport management company PT Angkasa Puri 1 went on strike for six hours. The strike affected over 10,000 passengers and disrupted hundreds of flights at airports in East Kalimantan, Papua, South Sulawesi, North Sulawesi and Maluku.

Many of the workers, members of the Angkasa Pura Workers Union (SPAP1), walked off the job wearing black shirts bearing the message, "We're on strike."

The union called the strike after negotiations with management stalled over the company's refusal to honor a 2006 collective work agreement. The agreement entitled workers to salary increases that brought their pay into line with public servants and provided increased pension payments and health insurance for retirees.

SPAP 1 general secretary Sulistyana said the union planned to carry out more strikes of 12-hours duration which would escalate to 24 hours if workers' demands are not met.

The workers previously held four rallies in Jakarta—in May, July and September 2007 and in March 2008—over the same issue. Management claims that the strike was illegal and has threatened legal action.

East Timor public transport drivers protest

On May 6, East Timorese public transport drivers went on strike and protested outside Government Palace in Dili to demand that Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao control the price of oil.

Driver Egas Patricio said that oil prices were being increased because there was no regulation. "We all are on strike because the oil price is very high and we need the government to solve the problem as soon as possible," he said.

Bangladeshi apparel workers hold street protests

On April 30, about 400 employees from Chowdhury Apparels in the Ashkarabad area of port city Chittagong demonstrated for two-and-half hours resulting in a four-kilometre traffic jam. The workers are owed three months'

salary.

Garment worker Rina Akhter said that management had promised to pay salary arrears on three separate occasions. Employees returned to work after meeting with a government official who assured them they would be paid.

At the same time, around 500 garment workers from Expo Worldwide held a sit-down protest at Rampura in the capital Dhaka for about an hour to demand payment of two-month salary arrears and overtime. They lifted the barricade after the police intervened and the company agreed to pay the outstanding amount.

Indian Honda workers move to prevent layoffs

Hero Honda plant workers in Dharuhera, Haryana, went on strike on May 3 after management transferred contract workers from one section to another. Workers feared that it would result in lay-offs.

Employees rejected management assurances that the move would not have any repercussions on either the wages of the casual workers or their continued employment.

Indian port workers go-slow over bonus payment

New Mangalore Port employees in Karnataka ended a go-slow campaign on May 6 for a "speed money" allowance to be paid in cash rather than by cheque.

According to a port management spokesman, the go-slow severely affected the unloading of fertiliser vessels and reduced productivity to 30 percent of normal levels.

Sri Lankan health workers strike

Minor (auxiliary) staff at Sri Lankan government hospitals in cities of the North Central Province, including Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, went on strike on May 7 over a series of demands. Workers want immediate payment of a uniform allowance, distress loans and implementation of a promotion scheme for minor staff.

Services at the hospitals were crippled by the strike. The Sri Lanka Janajaya Health Services Union members held a 13-day hunger strike (Satyagraha) about six months ago over the same issues but none of their demands were met.

Tasmanian public servants vote for industrial action

On May 5, around 1,200 Tasmanian public servants attending the first of three statewide scheduled meetings in

Hobart voted for a campaign of industrial action for a 20 percent pay increase to achieve and maintain pay parity with their counterparts in other Australian states.

The claim covers around 17,000 public servants—from senior officials to pathology support workers—and includes a 9 percent increase to establish parity and annual increases of 3.5 percent over the next three years.

The Tasmanian Labor government has offered a 3 percent annual increase but refuses to meet the parity catch-up. Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry CEO Damon Thomas backed the government's response and demanded that it "hold its nerve in the face of the industrial unrest".

Initial industrial action is expected to involve bans on revenue collection, information supplied to ministers' offices and the preparations for next month's state budget. A Community and Public Sector Union and the Health and Community Services Union spokesman said that members were very angry and that strikes could not be ruled out: "I'd say they're keen to go the whole way with this."

Mass meetings in Launceston and the state's northwest in coming days are expected to endorse industrial action.

New Zealand junior doctors strike over pay

A second wave of strike's by 2,000 New Zealand junior doctors began on May 7, after pay talks between the Resident Doctors Association (RDA) and 21 District Health Boards (DHBs) ended in stalemate last week. The strike was due to last for 49 hours. The doctors, who act as residents in the public hospital system, struck for 48 hours late last month in support of a 30 percent pay rise over three years.

In a late bid to reach a settlement the RDA earlier this week tabled a lower "complex" claim which amounted to a pay increase of about 8 percent a year. The current offer from the DHBs is for 4.25 percent.

The junior doctors have been kept isolated by the senior doctors' union, the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists, which has allowed its members to carry out resident doctors' work during the strikes, and by the NZ Council of Trade Unions (CTU). CTU president Helen Kelly publicly denounced the junior doctors' strikes as "giving unions a bad name".

In a separate dispute, senior doctors were due to meet this week to consider ratification of a proposed settlement with DHBs. The provisional settlement averted industrial action by the senior doctors who had threatened to strike.

New Zealand chemical workers return to work

While Ecolab Hamilton plant employees have returned to work after four weeks of strike action the company has refused to sign up to the Metals multi-employer collective agreement (MECA).

According to the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing

Union (EPMU), the US-based chemical giant agreed to a pay rise and to re-enter collective agreement negotiations. Ecolab appears to have staved off joining the Metals MECA, a union demand at the centre of the four week strike, by arguing that its American owners had a "philosophical objection" to industry-wide agreements.

The EPMU has also withdrawn its notice of industrial action at power lines contractor Energex after reaching a settlement with the company during mediation. The terms of settlement will be taken to members for ratification. Energex workers are responsible for the maintenance of the Vector-owned Auckland lines network.

Meanwhile, manufacturing workers at fastener manufacturer Assa Abloy have settled on an 11 percent pay rise over two years following four days of industrial action involving an overtime ban and partial work to rule. It was the first time industrial action had ever been taken at Assa. The deal is for an 8 percent across-the-board pay rise over the next two years with a further 3 percent allocated according to skills and training.

Auckland casino and hotel workers hold stop-work

SkyCity casino hotel and entertainment complex employees in Auckland held a stop-work meeting late last month to vote on a contract claim. The 400 workers are members the SEA-Unite union.

The claim includes, all pay rates to increase by about \$2 an hour, additional weekend payments, overtime payments at time-and-a-half, service pay, incentive payments for attendance and long-service pay.

The workers also want job security for part-time and casuals, protection of permanent eight-hour and 10-hour shifts, provision of free meals and a collective employment allowance. The union is insisting that new wage levels and conditions only apply to union members.



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