

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

31 May 2008

Protracted strike continues despite intimidation

A strike by Allianz insurance company employees in South Korea which began in January 23 this year is continuing. The strike is over management's introduction of performance pay without any discussion.

This week, a court in South Korea ruled that the company had breached the terms of a collective agreement signed in December 2006 when it sacked 87 sales managers for joining the strike. The court, however, has prohibited all picketing outside senior management homes.

Earlier this month, Allianz Life Korea Union (ALKU) president and another trade unionist were arrested to prevent them travelling to Germany to confront the parent company. Employees want the dismissed managers reinstated, detained unionists released, withdrawal of the new pay system and negotiations for a collective agreement.

Pakistani teachers demonstrate

Feeder school teachers protested in Jati and Shah Bandar in Pakistan's Sindh province on May 24 over the non-payment of salaries.

Feeder schools are community-based institutions established by the National Commission for Human Development to assist children unable to access government schools. According to reports, feeder schools and the payment of salaries, particularly in the far-off coastal areas, are threatened by the non-release of funds.

Pakistani workers protest for union rights

Lahore factory workers protested outside the Lahore Press Club on May 23 in defence of union rights. The demonstration was triggered by the closure of a factory on the Raiwind Road and the dismissal of 150 workers four days earlier for establishing a trade union.

Protestors carried placards and shouted slogans in defence of union rights and condemning factory owners over the sackings. The Working Women Organisation and All Pakistan Trade Union Federation organised the

demonstration.

Indian transport workers protest for permanency

Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC) employees held a sit-down protest outside the corporation's offices in Tirunelveli in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu on May 27. The workers demanded job regularisation of all temporary conductors employed by the company for 240 days or more.

They also called for all technical assistant vacancies to be filled with preference given to corporation-trained apprentices, the immediate disbursement of retirement benefits and government supervision of a revamped employee pension scheme.

In a separate dispute, Tamil Nadu Electricity Board employees from Tirunelveli demonstrated on May 24 to demand regularisation of contract workers' jobs. The electricity board employees are members of the Confederation of Tamil Nadu Electricity Board Workers.

Indian medical workers demand reinstatement

Medical workers at the Maharaja Krishna Chandra Gajapati Medical College in Berhampur, in the north-eastern state of Orissa, demonstrated inside the campus on May 20. They want reinstatement of 63 class IV employees retrenched seven years ago.

The workers marched from the college square and presented a memorandum to the college's administrative officer and the Chief Minister. The State Administrative Tribunal has passed an order supporting reinstatement of the sacked employees.

There are currently 67 Class IV employee vacancies at the medical college and its associated hospital. The Temporary and Retrenched Employees Union (TREU), which organised the demonstration, has pledged to step up protests if the government fails to act within the next few months.

Qantas engineers hold stop-work meetings

Licensed aircraft engineers at Qantas in Sydney, Melbourne and other capital cities held four-hour

stopwork meetings this week over their demands for an annual 5 percent wage rise over three years. Managerial engineering staff were flown in from around the country to replace engineers attending the Sydney stop-work.

Previously scheduled meetings were postponed by the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers Association (ALAEA), at the behest of Australian Council of Trade Unions secretary Sharon Burrow, following revelations that Qantas was preparing a lock-out and recruiting a scab workforce.

The dispute erupted anew in April after the engineers voted down an in-principle agreement brokered by the ALAEA executive based on a 3 percent wage offer and the surrender of working conditions.

Qantas is determined to hold down employees' wages and undermine conditions in order to offset rising costs, including fuel price rises, which it estimates will add an extra \$2 billion to the company budget this year.

Teachers to continue pay dispute

Northern Territory (NT) teachers walked off the job on May 26 after negotiations broke down in a long-running campaign for a 15 percent pay rise over three years. Education union members have rejected an 11 percent offer from the NT Labor government. The stoppage was part of three days of rolling stoppages affecting schools in Darwin and Tennant Creek.

Nursing home staff threaten to strike

Staff at the Bridgewater nursing home in Roxburgh Park in Melbourne's north threatened this week to strike unless they receive confirmation that their entitlements are protected.

Bridgewater was placed in administration on May 23 after it was unable to guarantee residents' bonds worth more than \$8 million. The home's largest shareholder is the Glebe Administration Board, an investment arm of the Anglican Church.

The federal government guaranteed repayment of the bonds and alternative care for the home's 107 patients but failed to provide assurances to the 120 Bridgewater employees that they would be given unpaid wages, back pay and super entitlements.

A spokesman for the Health Services Union said: "If we aren't given guarantees, we can't recommend to our members that they keep working just for the love of the job". The administrator said he was still determining whether the nursing home could be sold as a viable business.

New Zealand teachers college staff protest job cuts

Staff and students at the Victoria University of

Wellington's College of Education protested outside the main entrance in Karori on May 22 against proposed cuts, which will result in a 15 percent staff reduction, including 22 of the college's 191 academic posts and seven of 44 administration positions.

The Association of University Staff (AUS) criticised the restructuring proposal as "crude" and claimed that it would diminish standards of teacher education.

An AUS branch spokesman said the university does not have "any plans for maintaining the quality of the college's core function, teacher education, while making such severe cuts". He said the government had markedly reduced funding levels for postgraduate degrees, which were "overwhelmingly preferred" by teachers wanting to upgrade their qualifications.

Fijian construction workers victimised

Fijian police moved against a picket blocking sub-contractors from entering the construction site of the Grand Apartments in Martintar, Nadi, on May 24. The picket was established after 40 construction workers were sacked by the main building employer the previous day.

The company claimed it wanted to sub-contract work and cut costs but the Building, Construction and Timber Workers Union maintains that the workers were being victimised for having joined the union a fortnight earlier.

The union claims that the terminations will be a test case for the Employment Relations Promulgation, which purportedly requires employers to respect workers' rights. The employer failed to give workers notice or pay in lieu. Under the Employment Relations Promulgation workers have the right to form a union and to expect "good-faith bargaining". The union has lodged a dispute with the Ministry of Labour.

Solomon Islands Telekom staff demand removal of CEO

More than 300 Solomons Telekom employees held a sit-in protest on May 21 to demand the removal of chief executive officer Martyn Robinson. Workers claim that Robinson is "racist, biased and dictatorial" in his management style.

They were advised by lawyers to return to work and allow negotiations to occur. Telephone services in Solomon Islands were disrupted for about 24 hours.



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