

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

28 June 2008

Indian textile workers continue strike over pay

Over 850 workers from textile producer Reid and Taylor located in Thandya Industrial Area in Nanjangud Taluk, Karnataka, are continuing strike action begun on June 9.

Employees are currently paid 4,500 rupees (\$US128) a month and want this increased to 6,500 rupees. The company has only offered a 1,550-rupee rise spread over the next three years. The strikers have pitched tents outside the factory and are holding ongoing sit-down protests.

Karachi municipal workers strike over outsourcing

Municipal workers at the City District Government Karachi (CDGK) in Pakistan held a three-day strike and hunger protest on June 19 in protest against the outsourcing of garbage-collection to a private Chinese company.

Employees are concerned about job security with one worker telling the media: "Although nobody has seen the contract signed between CDGK and the Chinese firm, we have learnt that the firm would not hire sanitation workers over 40 years of age, which means thousands of our colleagues would become jobless."

No sanitation workers have been hired by CDGK since 1992 so the majority of employees are now either above or around 40-years of age. The workers also expressed concern over salaries, pensions and other benefits when the Chinese firm takes over.

Philippines power workers vote to strike

This week, 151 of the 171 unionised workers at the privately-owned Cagayan de Oro Light and Power Company (Capalco) in Cagayan de Oro City voted to strike if the company continues to ignore their demands for a wage increase and other benefits.

Employees have been conducting daily off-duty pickets after the union, the Capalco Employees Labor Union (Celu), issued a notice of strike with the National Conciliation and Mediation Board in Northern Mindanao

on May 28.

The workers want wage increases of 2,200 pesos (\$US49.50) a month for 2008 and another 2,200 pesos in 2009. They also want a rise in retirement pay, a signing bonus, profit sharing, Christmas bonus, longevity pay and light allowances.

Negotiations are deadlocked because the company will only agree to 1,600 pesos this year and 1,000 in 2009, and has rejected most of the other demands. Employees' current average monthly wage is 17,000 pesos (\$US383.31), well below the official living wage of 21,000 pesos.

Indonesian cigarette workers demand compensation

Around 12,000 workers at cigarette producer PT Sampoerna, in Surabaya began an indefinite strike on June 23 to demand a compensation payment from the multi-million sale of the company by its owner Putra Sampoerna to Philip Morris. They want 25 million rupiah (\$US2,700) per worker.

While there are about 155 tobacco companies in Indonesia, four major producers—Gudang Garam, Djarum Kudus, Sampoerna and Bentoel—have about 85 percent of the market.

Sampoerna, the third-largest, produces kretek clove cigarettes which contain extremely high levels of nicotine and tar. Tests on the clove oil eugenol, used in the cigarettes, show that it causes extensive lung damage.

Philip Morris, along with two other multi-nationals, BAT Indonesia and Rothmans, has been attempting to lift their local market share where they do not face the same restrictions on the advertising and sale of tobacco products as in western countries. As far back as 2005, Philip Morris announced it would pay \$US2 billion (\$A2.1 billion) for a 40 percent controlling stake in Sampoerna.

The tobacco industry is the second largest employer in Indonesia with an estimated 17-million workforce engaged in farming, trading, transportation and

advertising.

Firefighters to impose work-to-rule

Queensland firefighters are threatening further industrial action in support of a 20 percent pay claim. In February, up to 600 officers marched on Queensland state parliament to press their demand for improved wages.

They want the Queensland government to compensate firefighters for having taken on extra activities. The union claims that a government offer made last week and upheld by the Industrial Relations Commission provided nothing extra to most officers.

A United Firefighters Union spokesman said the offer failed to recognise “added job value”, which he estimated had increased by 47 percent. He claimed that many firefighters were working in second jobs to supplement wages that ranged between \$15 and \$21 an hour.

Firefighters have begun reviewing extra duties for which they are not compensated and said that these would be subject to bans. One senior officer told media that strike action was not out of the question “given the level of anger about poor wages that leave firefighters the worst paid emergency workers in the state.”

NZ Department of Labour staff signal 24-hour strikes

Public servants at the New Zealand Department of Labour voted at stop-work meetings on June 19 to escalate industrial action, including a series of 24-hour strikes, if the department did not improve the offer made in negotiations for a new collective employment agreement.

The stoppage was the third two-hour walkout by the 750 workers in less than a week. The action has included border security officers at Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch airports, health and safety inspectors, immigration officers, labour inspectors and industrial mediators.

Public Service Association (PSA) members at the department began collective agreement negotiations in September last year, seeking a new pay-setting system and a 4 percent across-the-board pay rise. A PSA spokesman said there were key issues to be resolved, including the date when the pay rise takes effect.

The union is filing notice of fourteen 24-hour strikes from July 3 to July 17. PSA members will also maintain “work-to-rule” and overtime bans. A PSA spokesman said the union hoped the matter would be resolved in negotiations.

New Zealand education staff meet over pay claim

Up to 900 Group Special Education (GSE) field staff

attended a series of stop-work meetings as part of a bid to improve pay scales and professional conditions. Those included special education advisors, psychologists, speech language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and early intervention teachers.

The meeting was called by NZ Educational Institute to consider a pay claim to improve GSE staff pay scales to reflect specialist skills. Negotiations with the Ministry of Education are planned for July 14.

Solomon Islands Telekom workers continue strike

More than 300 striking Solomon Islands Telekom (Our Telecom) employees continue to defy government calls that they end industrial action.

The workers walked out on June 17 demanding that the company’s chief executive officer Martyn Robinson be removed from office. The indigenous workers have accused Robinson of discriminatory practices.

A special meeting was held by the Our Telecom board last week to discuss the workers’ demands. A Cable & Wireless representative travelled to Honiara to participate in the meeting. The British-based telecommunications company is in partnership with Solomon Islands Telekom.

The Civil Aviation Authority has warned that if the strike continues for much longer, there could be serious disruptions to domestic and international flights.

In a separate dispute, Solomon Islands public servants announced earlier this week they would hold a national strike on June 27 to demand a salary increase and improvements in employment conditions. The workers are members of the Solomon Islands Public Employees Union.

French Polynesia resort workers end 115-day strike

A long-running industrial dispute at a hotel in French Polynesia has been settled. The Relais Mehana Hotel on the island of Huahine was closed on March 1 following strike action over conditions of employment.

The beach resort has now been reopened after an agreement allowing some of the striking employees to work part time. The 115-day strike, which the government claimed was illegal, was one of the longest in the territory.



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