

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

7 March 2009

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

## Korean media workers strike over media laws

Some 2,000 members of the National Union of Media Workers at MBC, one of the country's three major broadcasting networks, walked off the job on February 26, a day after South Korea's Grand National Party government tabled legislation to deregulate broadcasting ownership. The laws will allow some of the country's largest newspapers and corporate conglomerates to take over broadcasting companies.

Two days later, 2,000 protesters from the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions and civic groups clashed with police in central Seoul while protesting the media laws and government attempts "to pass the burden of the economic crisis onto labourers." Ten protesters and policemen were injured in the skirmish and 31 protesters were arrested.

Thousands of media workers at South Korean radio and television stations held a 12-day strike over the legislation in late December. They returned to work on January 7, after the government agreed to put the proposed laws on hold.

## Panasonic employees in China protest

Around 600 Panasonic Electronic Devices (Beijing) employees held a six-hour blockade at the offices of three top company executives on February 25. The workers were protesting against the company's low voluntary redundancy package.

Employees accused Panasonic of trying to cut entitlements by offering voluntary rather than forced redundancies and said they would file a complaint against the company with China's labor department.

Panasonic has three Beijing factories which manufacture kinescopes, capacitors and electronic devices. The company claimed that they were cutting staff numbers because of reduced orders caused by the "economic

situation".

## Indian transport workers protest for pay rise

Around 350 workers from the Kadamba Transport Corporation in Goa have vowed to continue daily protests, which began on February 27 at the Panaji bus stand, after talks with the labour commissioner and management for implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission became deadlocked this week.

Employee representatives at the government-subsidised bus company stormed out of a meeting with company officials when told that "administration processes" had delayed introduction of the new pay scales.

All India Trade Union Congress general secretary Christopher Fonseca told the media that if the workers' demands were not met by the next meeting a larger protest, supported by other trade union members, would be organised.

## Gujarat junior doctors walkout

Hundreds of junior doctors from five districts in Gujarat, India launched an indefinite strike on March 2 to demand an increase of their monthly stipend.

Dr Om Lakhani from the Junior Doctors' Association said the doctors want their payments brought into line with other Indian states. According to the striking doctors, a resident receives only 9,633 rupees (\$US187) per month and a diploma student 5,858 rupees per month.

## Delhi hospital workers end strike action

Health staff at central government hospitals in Delhi called off their

week-long strike on February 28, after the government gave assurances that workers' demands for pay parity between nursing and technical staff and the revision of different allowances would be investigated.

Central administration has agreed for the time being not to implement sections of the Sixth Pay Commission and to maintain previous pay equality between staff.

### **Indonesian workers rally for legal rights**

Hundreds of workers demonstrated outside the Bangil District Court in Pasuruan on February 25 after the court sentenced the general manager of office equipment manufacturer PT King Jim Indonesia to 18 months' prison for violating the 1997 freedom of association law. The demonstrators then marched to the Surabaya District Court and the East Java High Court after the general manager appealed to have the ruling overturned in the high court.

Rally coordinator Anwar Sastro Ma'ruf told the press: "This is the first case where an employer is punished for violating the law, and therefore we will monitor the execution of the court's verdict. We fear the district court's verdict will be annulled by the high court or the Supreme Court." The protest was organised by Labor Rights Defenders Front, the Federation of Indonesian Metal Workers Union and the People's Labor Union.

### **Indonesian textile employees demand minimum wage**

Some 400 workers at PT Febrido Intiprima textile manufacturer in Cikupa Tangerang, protested at the factory compound this week to demand minimum wage rates. A spokesman for the workers said the recommended local minimum monthly wage was 1,055,000 rupiah (\$US87). The company only pays 1,010,850 rupiah a month.

### **Telstra workers maintain protests**

Hundreds of striking employees of Australia's largest telecommunications company, Telstra, demonstrated in central Melbourne on March 4 to demand improved pay and conditions.

Chanting, "We want an EBA [Enterprise Bargaining Agreement] today" and holding banners, the protesting workers demanded an explanation for the recent loss of 133 jobs in Bendigo and the plummeting share price. Demonstrators drew attention to outgoing Telstra chief executive Sol Trujillo's huge departure package.

Telstra employees on expired EBAs have not had a pay rise in 18 months. According to the unions, Trujillo's wage increased by 13 percent, to more than \$13 million (\$US8.5million), during the same period.

Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) and Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members began four-hour rolling strikes this week which will culminate in overtime and recall bans on the weekend. Union members began industrial action in December, after management refused to continue negotiations with the unions for a new work agreement.

Telstra has offered its employees Employee Collective Agreements (ECAs) which have been overwhelmingly rejected by union members who insist that the two-part ECAs are designed to split the workforce and cut conditions.

Telstra claims its offer, which includes a 3.9 percent annual pay increase over three years, will deliver the best pay and conditions in the telecommunications industry. The company is refusing to negotiate with the unions, claiming only 15 percent of Telstra employees are union members.

### **Victorian brewery workers rally to save jobs**

Around 80 maintenance workers for global beverages firm Foster's Group Ltd rallied outside the company's Abbotsford brewery in Melbourne on March 4. The workers threatened to blockade the plant and stop beer production if the company failed to reverse its decision to outsource 115 maintenance jobs.

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and Electrical Trades Union members also claim to have thousands of signatures on a petition opposing Foster's moves.

Last month Foster's announced a five-year alliance with maintenance contractor ABB Australia. Foster's invited its maintenance employees to apply for jobs with ABB but there is no guarantee that ABB will employ any of them.

### **Victorian metal-coating workers strike**

About 100 Akzo Nobel workers in Sunshine, Victoria, struck on March 3 over the company's refusal to negotiate a new workplace agreement. The metal-coating workers have not had a pay increase since August 2007.

Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMWU) assistant secretary Ben Redford told the media that the company had "blackmailed" employees with mass redundancies if they pursued a new enterprise bargaining agreement.

Akzo Nobel offered employees "guaranteed job security for 12 months in exchange for a pay freeze," declaring that "the economic climate is

having a significant impact on business." The LHMU has refused to drop its demand for a 5 percent pay increase.

### **Sacked construction workers demonstrate**

Forty sacked Civil Pacific Services employees from the Westgate reconstruction project rallied outside the offices of construction giant John Holland this week in Port Melbourne. The AMWU and CFMEU members, who were employed last December and told to expect two years' full-time work, were dismissed on March 2 without warning.

AMWU organiser Tony Mavromatis said Civil Pacific Services had agreed to a collective agreement that paid the industry standard but the builder, John Holland, refused to pay. Mavromatis claimed John Holland is currently advertising for other workers to fill the jobs at a cheaper rate.

### **Customs officers at Sydney airport protest**

Around 200 Australian Customs officers and supporters rallied outside the international terminal at Sydney Airport on March 2 to protest the introduction of an annual \$2,000 parking levy. Qantas workers and airport quarantine staff also joined the protest, fearing that they too would have to pay the levy.

Australian Customs and Border Protection management claim that the levy was introduced because a three-year, free car-parking arrangement had expired. Management's decision, however, to maintain free parking for executive staff has angered many Customs Officers, who have resolved to continue their campaign.

### **PNG nurses launch wildcat strike**

Over 3,000 Papua New Guinea (PNG) public hospital nurses walked off the job across the country on February 26 to demand the government implement the 2006 Nurses Salary Reclassification (NSR) and lift pay rates.

The walkout was in defiance of the PNG Industrial Registrar's refusal to allow a strike ballot and a nurses' union directive not to walkout. Papua New Guinea Nurses Association President Eimi Kaptigau admitted to the media that the nurses wanted to force the government to "pay up" and had defied her order not to strike during negotiations.

While nurses began returning to work at most major hospitals on March 3, they remain on strike at the Port Moresby General Hospital and the Wewak Hospital in East Sepik Province. The union is continuing talks with the government.



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