

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

24 August 2002

Indonesian police gun down protestors

Police in Bandung, the provincial capital of West Java, shot two workers on Monday during a peaceful demonstration against two anti-labour bills currently being debated in Indonesia's House of Representatives. Syarif Hidayat, 31, and Supardjo, 32, employed by PT Posulam Indoutama in Cimahi, were taken to the local police hospital suffering gunshot wounds to the head and leg respectively.

Over 3,000 participated in the demonstration, which included workers from Leuigadjah, Cimahi, Cimindi, Cijerah and Padalarang industrial areas and textile company employees from Kopo, Rancekek and Majalaya. The shootings occurred when police and security officers attempted to prevent demonstrators calling on PT Cibaligo workers in Cimahi to join the rally. The Action Committee for Labor Solidarity, which organised the protest and gave municipal police prior notice, has urged a "thorough investigation" of the incident.

The proposed "settlement of labor disputes" bill clears the way for striking workers to be tried by the civil courts while the "labor development and protection" bill means workers found guilty of "using violence during labour actions" could face fines of 400 million rupiah (\$US45,000) and four-year jail terms.

Thousands of workers protest in Jakarta against Nike

Over 4,000 workers from Tangerang in Indonesia's Banten province demonstrated in Jakarta on August 20 against plans by the footwear giant Nike to cut production at Indonesian supply plants. Nike will terminate its contract with Doson Indonesia, one of its local suppliers, in November.

Protesters disrupted traffic as they marched through central Jakarta to rally outside the US embassy demanding Nike compensate laid-off workers. A spokesman for the Indonesian Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Union said: "Nike has no social responsibility. They are just exploiting the workers, getting their profit and then leaving."

The demonstration follows similar protests by Reebok workers last month over production cutbacks. The union

estimates that production cuts could cost 7,000 jobs at Nike and over 5,400 at Reebok.

Sri Lankan estate workers strike over unpaid wages

A strike by 200 workers over unpaid wages at Nellimalai private estate in Panvila, near Kandy, has entered its second month. Workers say they were not paid for one month's work in May. On August 9, 350 workers from Kuttapitiya estate near Palmadulla also began strike action because they were not paid in July. The estate union covering the strikers has registered a complaint with the Palmadulla area Labor Commissioner because plantation management has so far refused to discuss the dispute.

Bata showroom workers campaign to defend jobs

Showroom workers for shoe manufacturer Bata picketed factory outlets in Ratmalana, a southern suburb near Colombo, and in Kandy on August 7, in protest over the company's downsizing of its national workforce. The protesters also demanded the company reopen closed showrooms and end outsourcing work to contractors.

Sri Lankan workers demonstrate against privatisation

About 2,000 workers demonstrated at Lipton Circle in central Colombo on August 20 against the privatisation of government institutions and the recent closure of 50 factories, which has resulted in the destruction of over 50,000 jobs. This included the axing of 4,040 jobs at Tri Star garment, 1,089 jobs at G.C.K. Garment and 480 jobs at Lipton. Protestors also demanded a 5,000-rupee (\$US50) monthly salary increase and other rises to cover cost of living index increases. The demonstration was organised by the Inter-Company Workers Union.

Qantas workers strike again over pay

Qantas domestic flights were disrupted for 24 hours on August 19 when 6,000 administrative and customer service employees struck over a new enterprise work agreement, a 10 percent salary increase over two years and job security guarantees. The strike is the second in a month. Qantas has offered only a 6 percent pay increase and refuses to discuss job security. Workers believe Qantas plans to outsource some customer service work.

Workers demand collective agreement

Twelve workers at Dayson, a compressor manufacturer in the Sydney suburb of Rydalmere, are continuing indefinite strike action over management's refusal to negotiate a collective work agreement. Dayson, a subsidiary of the US-owned Trane, has demanded employees sign individual work contracts.

The workers walked off the job 14 weeks ago on May 21, after the Dayson sacked seven union members, including the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) job delegate Greg Cummins.

An AMWU spokesman said the company "needed to face the fact that the workers have chosen a union to represent them". Dayson workers joined the Electrical Trades Union and the AMWU last year.

Dayson management has ignored a NSW Industrial Relations Commission recommendation to begin negotiations with the union and is threatening to take legal action in the Federal Court to stop workers picketing the plant.

Media workers demand pay increase

Journalists and photographers at the *Toowoomba Chronicle* in Queensland struck for 24 hours on Friday to demand a 4 percent pay rise as part of a new enterprise work agreement. APN News and Media, which owns the newspaper and a large number of regional newspapers through Australia, has offered only 2.5 percent.

Twenty-four hour strike action by media workers at 14 other APN-owned regional outlets in Queensland and NSW was cancelled on Friday after the Industrial Relations Commission ordered a stay of action until September 22. The workers are members of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance.

Hotel employers end free meals to workers

Workers at the Marriott and Hyde Park Plaza hotels in Sydney protested in hotel canteens this week over the elimination of free meals. Workers refused to pay and chanted slogans condemning the new \$2 meal surcharge.

A union spokesman accused hotel management of attempting to claw back a recent wage increase granted to low-paid hotel workers. He said the meal charge would effectively cut the \$18 per week pay increase and warned that other Sydney hotels would attempt to introduce fees for employee meals.

New Zealand preschool teachers to get pay parity

New Zealand kindergarten teachers unanimously voted this week to accept a 61 percent pay increase over the next four years. The increase will eventually give kindergarten teachers pay parity with other New Zealand teachers. Kindergarten teachers are historically the worst paid of all state teachers. Demands for unified teacher pay scales have been raised for the past 27 years.

By 2006, kindergarten teachers will get equal pay with primary and secondary school teachers if they have the same qualifications and experience. Over the next four years, salaries for kindergarten teachers with a degree and three years' experience will increase from \$31,244 to \$50,316. Starting rates for kindergarten teachers with a degree will rise from \$28,003 to \$35,200.

New Zealand secondary teachers to get pay increase

An arbitration panel recommended pay rises for New Zealand's 14,400 secondary school teachers this week, but failed to offer any solution to the mounting crisis over increased workloads. The panel, which was called to arbitrate on the 17-month pay dispute between the Labour government and the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA), granted an immediate 3.5 percent pay rise, increasing to around 12.1 percent next year. The teachers will vote on the recommendations next week.

Arbitration is binding for the government but not for PPTA members who have rejected two government-union deals and taken wildcat strike action. The deal is worth \$NZ250 million, about \$50 million more than the union originally claimed and \$70 million above the government's allocated budget.

The starting rate for secondary teachers would increase by 9.8 percent to \$37,323. A teacher at the top of the scale would receive an increase of 12.1 percent to take their base salary to \$56,392. About 70 percent of teachers are at the top of the pay scale. The immediate 3.5 percent pay rise on the base salary includes a 2 percent pay rise, backdated to July 2001, followed by a further 1.5 percent rise. There would be another 3 percent rise from July 1, 2003.

Many teachers regard the proposals as insufficient. The recommendations will not resolve mounting problems caused by under-funding and overwork exacerbated by the introduction this year of a new qualifications system, the National Certificate in Educational Achievement.

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