

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

30 December 2006

Asia

Chinese textile workers protest over unpaid wages

Over 100 textile workers in eastern Hangzhou city demonstrated on December 23 to demand the immediate payment of two months' outstanding wages or about 400,000 yuan (\$US50,000). Workers told the media that their employer, the Hangzhou Pushu Clothing Co, was operating without a licence and that its owner, Zhou Gonglu, had disappeared.

Many of the company's mainly female employees have been evicted from their apartments because they have no money for rent and some said they had not eaten for three days.

The demonstration attracted thousands of supporters and local authorities dispatched 40 riot police who used gas to break up the protest. While six workers were arrested, city authorities, fearing further social tensions, had them released and promised to address their grievances.

About two weeks earlier, more than 3,000 laid-off and retired workers held a sit-in outside Hangzhou city administration buildings over inadequate financial assistance. The demonstration blocked main roads in the city.

Zoo workers strike in China

About 400 workers at a Chinese safari park in Shenzhen near the Hong Kong border struck on December 7 over wages, job losses and alleged management corruption. About 70 police officers were mobilised to stop employees erecting banners and signs outside the zoo.

The safari park, which has about 10,000 animals, was floated on the stock market last year. This led to cuts in overtime, the withholding of social security insurance premiums and the axing of 25 jobs from the transport department.

Workers decided to strike after discovering that 10 managers had each been paid 100,000 yuan (\$12,000) severance money, far more than other workers.

Park employee Qiu Zhongli told the media that workers were angry because the compensation for regular staff members was much less. "We've been working for the park for years and deserve more," he said. "We are fighting for money to live. We and the animals are victims."

Indian airline workers on one-day hunger strike

An estimated 3,000 employees of the state-owned Indian airline in Calcutta held a one-day hunger strike on December 26 over a long outstanding log of claims, which includes demands for wage rises, a pension scheme and proper career structure. According to workers, there has not been a wage revision for 10 years.

Demonstrations were held outside the airline's regional and airport offices but Airline Corporation Employees union leader S. D. Bhatt said the agitation would not be restricted to Calcutta and the protests would continue until December 31.

Gujarat port workers oppose privatisation

Workers at various ports in the Indian state of Gujarat walked off the job on December 25 in protest over government moves to privatise ports at Navlakhi, Okha, Magdala and Bhavnagar.

The workers, members of the Union of Gujarat Port and Lok Karamchari Mahasangh, said at least 2,000 people were directly or indirectly employed at the four ports and privatisation would impact on 10,000 families. They have threatened an all-out statewide strike if the government does not withdraw its plans. India currently has 12 major and 184 minor and intermediate ports, which handle almost 90 percent of its foreign trade. The Gujarat government administers 40 of the 43 ports in the state.

Indefinite strike at Indian colleges

Non-government teachers in Chandigarh began an indefinite strike at their respective colleges on December 21 over pensions and other claims. The striking teachers held a sit-down protest (dharana) at S D College, Sector 32. Members of the non-teaching employees union joined the protest.

Punjab and Chandigarh College Teachers Union president Rakesh Mehta denounced the government for failing to honour election promises and the teachers have threatened to intensify their protests if their demand for pensions is not met.

Indian construction workers demonstrate

Construction workers demonstrated outside the Erode Municipality in Tamil Nadu on December 21 to demand pensions. The Construction Workers Welfare Board has rejected an application for pensions by 5,200 building workers.

Workers alleged that their application seeking monetary assistance for education, marriage, delivery and natural deaths has been rejected "illegally". Others grievances include inadequate company responses to worksite accidents. The construction workers' union is affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)

Bangladeshi jute mill workers impose indefinite blockade

Jute mill workers in Khulna imposed an indefinite road and railway blockade on December 26 as part of their fight for an eight-point log of claims. Their demands include payment of salary and bonus arrears. Members of the Jute, Yarn, Textile Workers, Employees Action Council also demonstrated at different locations throughout the city.

The Bangladesh government has mobilised additional police and its notorious Rapid Action Battalion against the protesting workers.

Malaysian laboratory assistants work to rule

Some 3,000 lab assistants at 18 public institutions of higher learning and university colleges throughout Malaysia announced on December 20 that they will work-to-rule from January, following the government's failure to upgrade their positions to lab technologists or assistant officers.

Omar Osman, president of Local Public Higher Institutions Malaysia (Gakum), said the Higher Education Ministry had failed to respond to their request, which was first made in 2003.

Gakum has announced that its members will only work between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. The union is demanding a basic salary of 972 ringgits (\$US270) per month, up from 656 ringgits.

Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific

Ansett workers protest

More than 40 former Ansett workers and their families demonstrated outside the prime minister's official residence in Sydney on December 22 over the government's failure to release \$93 million still owing to more than 9,000 former employees of the airline.

The protest, which has been held each year since Ansett went bankrupt in 2001, was organised by the Transport Workers Union (TWU). The Howard government claimed that a special airline ticket levy would be used to pay the airline workers all their outstanding entitlements but so far they have received only 80 cents in the dollar.

Waving placards such as "Ansett workers still waiting ... pay up Howard, pay up," the demonstrators sang Christmas carols before delivering an "invoice" for their unpaid entitlements.

TWU spokesman Wayne Forno warned that Qantas employees could face similar treatment to the Ansett workers if an \$11.1 billion takeover of the Australian carrier by a private equity consortium went ahead.

Dave Lupton, who worked for Ansett for 27 years, said former employees were still suffering from Ansett's collapse. "People lost homes, had cars repossessed and have had marriage break-ups," he told the media. "A lot of terrible things went through their lives in the last five or six years. I don't want to see this happen to Qantas or any other company."

ABC workers pass no-confidence motion

A meeting of more than 30 Australian Broadcasting Corporation staff in Brisbane, Queensland passed a no-confidence motion in the ABC's state director Chris Wordsworth and human resources manager Gary Crane on December 22.

The resolution follows the release of an investigation revealing that incidences of breast cancer at the state-funded broadcaster's Toowong site in west Brisbane were at alarming levels. Twelve female ABC employees have contracted the disease at the site since 1995 with the breast cancer rate 11 times higher than the general working community.

While the ABC has now closed the studio and relocated more than 350 employees to other facilities, management refused to ignore previous warnings despite numerous meetings and several protests. This included strike action by almost 100 ABC staff

members in July, demanding they be relocated.

The meeting also called for the ABC to pay the medical expenses of past and present staff members who have sought treatment or testing for breast cancer. At least one of the victims has sought legal advice about possible compensation from the ABC.

New Zealand cash processing workers strike for more pay

Workers employed by New Zealand security firm ADT, which processes cash for the major banks, went on strike on December 22 for more pay. The strike was originally planned for two hours, but the 16 members of the Unite Union voted to stay out until after Boxing Day.

The workers are paid only slightly above the minimum wage. They want a \$14.92 start rate to give them pay parity with ADT's call centre employees. A Unite spokesperson accused the company of deliberately stalling negotiations over the past six months, saying ADT management wanted to delay negotiations further, until January 9.

Unpaid Papua New Guinea teachers plan strike action

About 400 teachers stranded in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG) because they have not been paid overdue holiday and leave entitlements have threatened to strike when public schools reopen in late January. Teachers have said that if their entitlements, including overdue payments from previous years, are not paid by January 22, they will reregister for duty but boycott all classroom duties.

For the past three weeks the teachers, all from the Central Province, have been gathering outside the Central Provincial Administrator's office to collect their entitlements. On December 21, provincial administrator Raphael Yibmaramba pulled a gun, threatening a group of the protesting teachers.

The next day, Yibmaramba told the teachers his office had just received the 2006 allowance allocation from the Treasury Department and the money was being processed. He denied, however, there were any outstanding payments from previous years.

Union representatives have said they anticipate teachers from other provinces will join the boycott and there will be a national strike.

Guadalcanal teachers threaten to strike

On December 20 about 300 teachers from the Solomon Islands province of Guadalcanal resolved to boycott classes next year over the non-payment of their 2006 passage leave.

Solomon Islands Teachers Association general secretary Johnley Hatimoana said although the union had met with education authorities about the allowances, they claimed the money was only for administrative purposes.

The teachers have threatened to boycott classes in all Guadalcanal schools for six weeks when classes commence on January 22.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact