Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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

Another factory closure in China

Around 1,500 workers were left jobless when the Bailingda Industrial Company closed its electrical appliance factory in Shenzhen on October 20. More than 1,000 of the laid-off workers gathered outside the factory demanding government intervention to secure unpaid wages.

Last week over 6,000 toy workers lost their jobs when toy manufacturer Smart Union closed its factory in Dongguan, owing workers six weeks' pay. The local authorities paid their wages after the factory management went into hiding.

The Chinese state press reported last week that 3,631 toy exporters—more than half of the nation's toy manufacturers—have closed this year.

South Korean police attack picket at electronics factory

One worker was hospitalised, many more injured and 12 arrested on October 15, when police and hired thugs attempted to remove a picket by sacked workers at the factory gate of electronics manufacturer Kiryung Electronics in Seoul. Several of the workers have been holding a sit-in protest and hunger strike on the roof of the factory gate guardhouse since June.

A dispute started with the company in July 2005, when workers hired through a sub-contracting labour agency joined the Korean Metal Workers Union (KMWU). After management began threatening the workers with dismissal, they went on strike in protest. The company proceeded to sack 32 workers.

The KMWU claims the government is supporting management's continued tactics of abuse, harassment and intimidation of union members. The union is calling for the immediate reinstatement of the sacked workers as permanent employees and compensation for lost pay during the three year strike.

Mass strike by India's central bank employees

Some 21,000 employees of the Reserve Bank of India walked off the job for one day on October 21 to demand better pensions. Members of the United Forum of Reserve Bank Officers and Employees in more than 20 offices nationwide took part. They are calling for the same pension as that paid to government employees and automatic revision of pensions when pay scales are adjusted.

The government bond market was forced to close and financial transactions across the country were severely disrupted.

Mass walkout by teachers in Andhra Pradesh

At least 300,000 school teachers in Andhra Pradesh began an indefinite strike on October 22 after the government failed to resume long-running talks with the Joint Action Committee of Teachers' Organisations. Over 40,000 schools covered by 22 teachers' unions are affected.

The union demands are mainly related to unified service rules, promotions and transfers of teachers. The teachers plan to rally at all municipality headquarters for the next three days and picket state government offices on October 25.

Andhra Pradesh power workers on hunger strike

A hunger strike by members of the Andhra Pradesh (AP) Electricity Employees' Union at five superintendent engineers offices in Visakhapatnam entered its third day on October 22.

The workers are protesting because the number of employees has fallen from 63,000 to 43,000 during the same time period that the number of consumers has doubled, requiring a substantial increase in plant and equipment and workload. The union has served a strike notice on AP Electricity for November 13.

Pakistan transport operators strike

Transport operators in the Pakistan city of Mansehra struck on October 17, affecting hundreds of commuters. The operator/drivers were protesting over a 30 percent hike in toll taxes. They resumed services the next day after the district administration said it will review the increase.

Queensland public health workers stop work

Operational and administrative staff from the Robina Hospital and Carrara Health Centre on Queensland's Gold Coast stopped work for three hours on October 22 to protest the state government's latest pay offer. Around 200 members of the Australian Workers Union and Australian Services Union gathered at Carrara Health Centre, where Health Minister Stephen Robertson had planned to conduct an official opening ceremony. He failed to attend.

The unions are seeking a 5 percent pay rise. The Queensland government has pegged all public service pay increases at 3.25 percent, but is offering a 4 percent rise (current inflation rate is 5 percent) provided they implement productivity improvements. The offer has been rejected.

Queensland teachers walk out over resources

About 1,700 teachers in south-east Queensland walked off the job on October 21 and 22 to attend one-hour stop work meetings at schools in Browns Plains, Logan East, Logan West and Woodridge.

The teachers union has been negotiating with the state Labor government for a year over support for students with learning difficulties and behavioural problems. Australian Education Union

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state president Steve Ryan said they want to highlight the fact the region is under-resourced and records more suspensions than other schools due to violence.

University workers in Victoria vote for industrial action

Over 300 members of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) at the Victoria University in Melbourne voted unanimously on October 20 to initiate an industrial campaign over the university's plan to slash 250 jobs. The university announced the cuts last week, saying they would be made to unpopular units and courses.

The union will take a proposal for strikes and work bans to the Industrial Relations Commission and plans to commence industrial action in mid-November.

Workers maintain vigil at closed Ballarat manufacturing plant

About 20 members of the Australian Manufacturing and Workers Union are maintaining a vigil outside the manufacturing plant of John Valves in Ballarat, Victoria. The company stood down 130 employees on October 15 while it tries to deal with a $4 million debt. Workers are picketing with signs saying "we don't deserve this" and "save our jobs".

The factory has been advertised for sale.

Rio Tinto train drivers escalate industrial action

Train drivers in the Pilbara, Western Australia, are ramping up industrial action following Rio Tinto's continued refusal to negotiate a collective agreement with the union. The company wants the workers to sign a non-union negotiated contract to replace expired Australian Workplace Agreements.

At a meeting in Karratha on October 20, Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members voted to hold back-to-back 12-hour strikes starting midday October 22, in an attempt to bring the company to the negotiating table. The drivers are seeking annual guaranteed pay increases equal to inflation, access to an independent umpire in disciplinary matters and assurances that their income will not be affected by Rio Tinto's plans to introduce automated trains on its main line in 2012.

CFMEU Mining Union national president Tony Maher said Rio Tinto has refused to hold meetings, let alone bargain, and under the current laws that leaves the workers with only two options—put up with the problems or go on strike.

NSW public school teachers protest transfer denial

About 150 teachers rallied outside New South Wales Parliament on October 23 in support of a teacher who has been denied a transfer under the state's new school staffing policy.

The NSW Teachers Federation says a teacher's application to move to a more favourable school after working for 11 years at western Sydney's remote Sackville Public School has been denied, even though she has the highest number of service points of any applicant.

Under the new policy, school principals can hire teachers directly, instead of teachers applying to the Department of Education and Training (DET) for transfers on the basis of their previous service.

DET director general Michael Coutts-Trotter was not influenced by the protest, saying that it would not achieve anything.

New Zealand workers strike over cuts to pay and conditions

More than 100 workers at stationery manufacturer Croxley struck on October 17 after the company attempted to cut nearly a million dollars out of their wages and reduce conditions during negotiations. The action comes after seven months of bargaining with the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU) and National Distribution Union (NDU) and affects the company's manufacturing plant in Avondale and its warehouse in Wiri.

In a similar dispute, EPMU members at hazardous waste disposal specialist Interwaste began strike action after the company tried to halve their sick leave, reduce their redundancy entitlements and offered a pay increase of only 3 percent—2 percent below the annual rate of inflation.

Since October 20, the company's six frontline workers have been on strike, forcing managers to cover their work, which includes dealing with hazardous hospital waste.

Casino union accepts SkyCity offer

After three months of industrial action, workers at the Auckland SkyCity casino and convention centre are meeting next week to vote on a new contract offer. The Unite union says the offer is "reasonable" even though non-union members are disadvantaged.

The new Collective Employment Agreement includes a 5 percent minimum wage increase from October 1, with another 4 percent from January 2010. Union members will also receive a $500 payment in lieu of backdated pay and a further $200 payment in 15 months' time. Other conditions covered are service pay, unpleasant duties allowance, and tool and safety boot allowances, security of hours and a procedure to transfer off full-time work.

Construction workers strike in the Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands National Union of Workers called workers at a hotel construction site in Honiara out on strike on October 21 to demand a pay increase, as well as payment of danger, transport, height, and housing allowances. The Papua New Guinean employer, Lamana Development, claimed the strike was illegal because a 14-day notice issued on October 14 had not expired.

The industrial action was called to pressure the company's general manager, John Robertson, to return from PNG to resume stalled negotiations.

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