

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

15 November 2008

Chinese workers protest over job security

Diesel engine factory workers at Yangdong Co Ltd in Jiangyan City, eastern China, held talks with local officials on November 11 after days of protests over job security at the troubled plant. Most of the 2,000 workers had blocked local highways, surrounded government offices and yelled chants of "Save our jobs" during the protest.

The workers also demonstrated against low wages and the non-payment of old-age pension entitlements.

Taxi driver strike action continues in China

Taxi drivers struck in two more Chinese towns on November 10, demanding government intervention over high rental fees.

Drivers in Sanya, a major tourist city in the island province of Hainan, stopped work and around 200 rallied at the municipal government building. The city has about 1,200 licensed cabs, owned by six companies. The drivers claim that cab companies have ignored municipal government policy implemented on January 1 which cuts drivers' monthly fees to the companies from 7,200 yuan (\$US1,054) to an average 5,300 yuan.

On the same day, drivers in Yongdeng County in northwest China's Gansu Province struck and rallied near the county's transport bureau office building. There are about 280 licensed cabs in the county.

Last week, 9,000 taxi drivers in Chongqing launched a two-day strike over insufficient supplies of gas, high fines for traffic violations and the unfair division of fares between drivers and companies.

India's doctors and health workers demand better pay and conditions

Over 4,000 striking doctors of the Karnataka Government Medical Officers Association (KGMOA) began boycotting all emergency services on November 12, including post-mortems, deliveries and medico-legal services, across the state. Members of the Karnataka Government ESI Medical Officers' Association have also joined the protest. The escalation follows two days of strike action.

The state government has failed to respond to doctors' demands, which include regularisation of contract doctors and improved health infrastructure at hospitals.

While the secretary of health and health commissioner told strikers that their demands would be investigated, the doctors said they would remain out until they get a concrete agreement in writing.

Two days earlier, on November 10, hundreds of Karnataka anganwadi (health) workers and helpers rallied at the Bangalore Urban Zilla Panchayat, urging the state government to grant long-outstanding demands. The Karnataka State Anganwadi Workers' Federation wants a pension scheme equal to that received by workers in Maharashtra state, regularisation of anganwadi services and payment of the minimum wage.

Indian Akademi workers in Orissa protest

Employees of the four Akademis (academies) in Orissa state launched a sit-down protest on November 12 outside the Samskruti Bhawan in Bhubaneswar. Their demands include the provision of pensions and insurance for employees, service conditions equal to other state government employees and the inclusion of 50 percent of the dearness allowance in salaries.

The protest was organised by the Rajya Akademi Karmachari Samanwaya Samiti (State Akademis' Employee's Coordination Committee).

Tamilnadu marketing workers stage hunger strike

Tamilnadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) Employees' Union members staged a one-day hunger strike in the city of Chinthamani on November 9. They are demanding TASMAC grant them government employee status, job permanency and fixed duty hours.

Sri Lankan apparel workers protest for overdue wages

Around 200 Kristi Lanka Apparel Factory employees in the Mawathagama Export Processing Zone, 115 kilometres from Colombo, protested outside their factory on November 8 to demand payment of overdue salaries from the past two months.

Factory management called the police and threatened to close the factory if workers did not return to work. Employees, however, vowed to maintain their action until they are paid.

Pakistani media workers' protests continue

Regular, contract and daily wage workers from the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) are maintaining protest action begun on October 22 for salary increases and regularisation of contract jobs. They said the government had failed to deliver on a promise to regularise 950 contract workers who are not paid benefits, such as medical assistance, granted to regular employees.

They are also protesting that 3,500 employees had not been paid a promised 20 percent salary increase, while the services of nearly 500 workers have not been upgraded since 2007. Radio Pakistan IT staff said that their contract had not been revised for two years.

Indonesian workers rally against minimum wage restrictions

Hundreds of workers, supported by scores of students and union activists, rallied outside the Satay Parliament House in Bandung, West Java, on November 12, against a newly introduced joint ministerial decree which ties wages to company profits. They also called for a 100 percent increase in the minimum wage.

Last week hundreds of workers from the Indonesian Federation of Labor Unions rallied at the Presidential Palace in Jakarta opposing the decree. The decree strips local authorities of their power to set minimum pay rates, giving individual employers a free hand in determining wages.

Kmart warehouse workers in NSW end strike

Around 150 employees at Kmart's distribution centre in Huntingwood, a western suburb of Sydney, Australia, returned to work on November 12, ending a six-day strike. National Union of Workers (NUW) members had picketed depot gates since last Thursday. The company refused to negotiate and threatened to lock out the strikers for a week.

Distribution centre employees have been pushing for a new collective agreement with Coles Myer since May, implementing a series of one-hour rolling strikes. Kmart has offered a 3.75 percent pay increase, but wants to reduce the afternoon shift loading. The union is demanding wage increases equivalent to the consumer price index of 5 percent and no change to shift loading.

The strikers returned to work after management agreed to re-enter negotiations with the union.

NSW teachers to stop work over pay offer

Teachers in public schools and TAFE colleges in New South Wales, Australia, plan to hold stop-work meetings throughout the state on November 19 to protest the state government's latest pay offer. The Labor government has offered teachers an annual increase of 2.5 percent, but the NSW Teachers' Federation wants a 5 percent annual increase.

The union's web site bulletin said the meetings would "debate further action in the beginning of the 2009 school year".

NT teachers vote on government pay deal

Northern Territory Education Union members are voting this week on the Territory government's latest offer for a new collective agreement. Among other things, the offer includes a 12 percent pay rise over three years, plus an extra one hour of non-contact work per week for primary school teachers.

The revised offer, however, includes the same pay increase public school teachers have consistently rejected over the course of negotiations. Union spokesman Adam Lampe told ABC News that the union was not recommending a position to its members on the ballot, but expected a pay deal could be brokered with the government by the end of the year.

The union leadership could be hoping that teachers retiring this year will vote for the pay deal, which is backdated to January. No provision has been made for retiring teachers to receive the back-pay if a new agreement is not finalised this year.

South Australian teachers' aides protest for conditions

School Services Officers (SSOs) at South Australia's public schools demonstrated outside state parliament in Adelaide on November 13 over job cuts and unpaid hours of work under the state Labor government's proposed Student Centred Resource Funding Model.

Australian Education Union (AEU) organiser Irene Tam said SSOs are employed on a part-time contract or casual basis to assist teachers and carry out administrative tasks. She said they have been overlooked in the latest workplace negotiations between the government and the AEU.

SA teachers to strike over pay offer

South Australian public school teachers are going ahead with a planned strike over their pay dispute despite it being forced into the Industrial Relations Commission by the government for mediation.

The AEU rejected the government's last pay offer on November 10, which offered teachers at the top salary level an increase of 14.21 percent over three years with the remainder of teachers and other staff, including principals and support workers, receiving an 11 percent rise over three years. The union is demanding 18 percent over three years

for all teachers and wants a proposed funding model, which remains a sticking point, to be dealt with separately.

Teachers are voting this week on whether to proceed with a full-day strike on November 21 followed by rolling half-day stoppages until the end of the year.

New Zealand retail workers continue to demonstrate

Farmers' retail store workers in Lower Hutt and Wellington demonstrated at the Cuba Mall in Wellington on November 7 in support of a better pay deal.

On October 6, National Distribution Union (NDU) members demonstrated outside Farmers' Queen St branch in Auckland, rejecting the company's offer in which workers' pay would only increase by a maximum of 60 cents. Most employees would only receive a 20-cent rise on their \$13.50 per hour wage. The NDU wants a \$15 per hour minimum wage.

NZ aged-care workers protest over pay

On November 6, aged-care workers, supported by residents at the Rosebank Rest Home and Hospital in Ashburton, protested outside the facility for the second time in two weeks for better pay. They waved placards saying "Pay parity for aged care workers" and "Fair share for aged care" and are collecting signatures on a public petition.

The aged-care workers have rejected the management's latest offer of a 1.2 percent pay increase in exchange for a reduction in staff hours leaving them with hardly any increase at all. The pay range for aged-care workers at Rosebank is between \$12.55 and \$13.05 an hour. New Zealand's minimum wage is \$12 an hour.

Susan Stewart from the New Zealand Nurses Organisation said the protest, which was held during staff members' own time, was to let people know how poorly they were paid. She did not mention whether the union was planning strike action.

Air Fiji union negotiating a pay cut

The Fiji Transport Workers Union held conciliation talks with Air Fiji management and government officials on November 6 over a 15 percent pay cut imposed on its members. The union was summoned to the meeting by the Ministry of Labor after Air Fiji workers voted for strike action over the issue.

The union and the management agreed to meet again this week to try to resolve the matter. According to a union spokesman, the major issue was not the pay cut as such, but that the company had implemented it "without the due process of the consultation that they are required under the collective agreement."

Papua New Guinea air traffic controllers strike

About 120 members of the Air Traffic Control Association walked off the job at numerous airports across Papua New Guinea on November 10 declaring they would not return to work until the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) does something about unpaid entitlements.

The controllers said CAA management and the government had failed to honour promises made on July 18 to pay outstanding entitlements. CAA claimed it had negotiated with the government but the funds would not be available until the end of this month.



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