

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

1 November 2008

Indian shoe retailing staff walk out over layoff fears

Over 350 employees at 70 Bata shoe stores in Mumbai and Thane walked off the job on October 28 over a move by management to put permanent staff on contract.

Bharatiya Kamgar Sena union members feared they will face the same fate as 172 permanent employees who have been laid off over the last 17 months. Union secretary V V Varghese said, "If there is no response [from management] we will extend the agitation to all of Maharashtra."

TV studio workers in Bollywood strike over wages

TV show producers claimed this week that 75 percent of shootings have been affected due to a strike by cine workers in Mumbai. The Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) had instructed its members "not to cooperate" with the producers if they refuse to pay the new wage rates specified in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed on October 3.

The MOU agreed between the union and Bollywood producers followed a three-day walkout by actors, lighting technicians, camera operators and dancers over low wages. The union reported on October 28 that most producers have begun paying the correct wages, and production is returning to normal.

Lighting appliance workers in India strike

Over 300 employees of Wipro Lighting Industry struck on October 27 after eight months of negotiations for a pay increase reached a deadlock. They are picketing the company's production plant in Mysore, Karnataka.

The average wage of Wipro workers is 3,500 rupees a month. The Mysore Division Industrial Workers General Union is demanding a basic wage increase to 5,000 rupees (\$US103) a month. The company is offering 1,000 rupees. The workers are also demanding improved subsidiary benefits such as House Rent Allowance (HRA), Leave Travel Allowance (LTA) and canteen facilities.

Pakistan oil workers protest over privatisation

Hundreds of workers of state-owned Oil & Gas Development Company rallied at the Multan Press Club in Multan on October 25 to protest the government's plan to privatise the company. They accused the PPP (Pakistan Peoples Party) government of breaking an election promise that it will not

privatise national assets.

Fearing job losses, they said they would "resist forcefully" if the government insisted on carrying out its plan.

Korean journalists hold mass rally at TV station

Hundreds of former and current journalists of cable news channel YTN rallied at the YTN building on October 24 to prevent YTN president Koo Bon-hong from entering the building.

The protesters wrapped banners around the building displaying the names of over 7,500 journalists who signed a petition opposing the government's instalment of Koo at the head of the station. Journalists fear Koo, a former aide to South Korea's president Lee Myung-bak, will compromise the channel's political neutrality.

During the course of 100 days of industrial action Koo has not been able to enter his office, and 12 journalists have been sacked and 33 disciplined.

Cambodian garment workers seize factory assets

Workers at the PDC garment factory in Phnom Penh seized machinery and assets after the factory closed without notice on October 25 and the manager and eight Chinese staff disappeared. The reason for the closure is not known.

The Cambodia Independence Federal Union has filed a complaint with the court and workers say the factory's assets will be used as compensation for unpaid salaries. A union spokesperson estimated the total assets are worth over \$US1 million.

Cambodian construction workers demonstrate for wages

Over 300 construction workers at Camko City, Phnom Penh, occupied their employers' office building on October 27, demanding that their late wages be paid immediately. Riot police were called in to disperse them after two hours. A Cambodian National Federation of Building and Wood Workers official said that despite some damage to company equipment no one was injured in the protest.

Union president Sok Sovandeith said Camko City, which employs more than 1,000 workers on wages as low as \$US4 a day, was two days late in paying wages. After an hour of protesting, 80 percent of the workers were paid on the spot, and the remainder were paid the next day.

South Australian teachers strike for pay rise

Around 400 of South Australia's 760 public schools closed

for half a day on October 29 when teachers struck to pressure the government for improved wages and conditions. The strike also affected kindergartens and TAFE campuses. About 4,000 teachers marched from Adelaide Oval to Parliament House wearing red clothing, carrying school banners and chanting slogans.

Teachers have unanimously knocked back the government's latest pay offer of a 12.5 percent pay rise over three years and are still demanding 21 percent. Anne Crawford from the Education Union said the offer was "less than the CPI [inflation rate of 5 percent] and the government has completely forgotten about school leaders, preschool directors, TAFE employees and non-teaching staff".

Industrial Relations Minister Paul Caica said the strike and rally by teachers would not force a higher pay offer from the SA Labor government. The union has applied to the Industrial Relations Commission for an interim 7 percent pay rise while the drawn-out dispute continues.

Queensland's public sector union accepts pay offer

The Queensland Public Sector Union has called off all planned industrial action after the Bligh Labor government signed an agreement that will deliver a 4.5 percent pay rise for the next 12 months, then 4 percent each year for the next two years, to 125,000 state workers. However the offer is below the inflation rate of 5 percent and below the union's original demand for a minimum 5.1 percent increase.

The agreement follows months of industrial action that affected nearly all government departments. About 45,000 hospital staff, teachers, Main Roads and Q Build workers will receive the rise immediately. The further 80,000 will get increases as their current agreements expire during 2009.

Queensland remote teachers strike over poor housing

For the second time this year, 150 public school teachers in Queensland's Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf Region walked off the job on October 29 over a long running dispute with the Labor government over the lack of maintenance to teachers' accommodation. According to Paige Bousen of the Teachers' Union, teachers' housing is substandard and "would not be acceptable anywhere else in rental accommodation".

NSW prison officers strike over privatisation

Several hundred striking prison officers protested outside the state Parliament House in Sydney on October 29 against moves to allow private operators to run Cessnock and Parklea prisons. The officers fear jobs will be lost and safety will be compromised.

New Zealand school support staff hold stop work meetings

More than 12,000 support staff at New Zealand's public schools will attend stop work meetings over a three-week period to consider a pay claim the union will take into collective agreement negotiations next year. Many support staff, including teachers aides, librarians, office managers, ICT (information and communications technology) specialists and

therapists, are paid as little as \$12.69 (\$US7.83) an hour.

The government has been holding up negotiations by implementing various working parties and reviews. The peak teachers union, the NZ Educational Institute, said "this time" it won't be prepared "to leave the bargaining table without a proper fix".

French Polynesia's public servants continue protests over pensions

On October 28, 1,000 public sector employees held a rally in the French Polynesian capital, Papeete, then marched to the French high commission and the territorial president's office to protest against the French government's plan to reform its territories pension scheme. The reforms aim to phase out the top-up of pensions offered to French public servants who retire in the colonies because consumer prices are often 300 percent higher than in France. Under a system introduced in 1952, pensions can be boosted up to 75 percent.

The reforms have been approved by the government but are yet to be endorsed by the legislature. French Polynesia's territorial assembly has passed a resolution asking for a moratorium on the reform, and public sector unions are calling for a general strike in two weeks time.

Public servants and retirees in both Tahiti and New Caledonia held large rallies opposing the plan earlier this month.

Papua New Guinean fire fighters strike

Fire officers of the Mount Hagen City Fire Service are refusing to attend any fire in the province and are calling for their top management to be sacked.

Their actions follow a fire last week that completely destroyed Kapal Haus, the three-storey provincial headquarters. The 16 fire officers said they had no protective gear, no proper fire trucks and no equipment to put out fires of that size.

The officers said they were risking their lives when attending to fire calls. They are demanding increased manpower, new fire trucks to replace their 20-year-old vehicle, new hoses and essential safety equipment.



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