

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

The
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Chinese toy factory workers protest over severance pay

On November 25, over 2,000 workers from the Hong Kong-based toy manufacturer Kader Holdings Company Ltd in Dongguan, a major industrial city on the Pearl River Delta, demonstrated over "pitiful severance payments" handed out to 596 employees laid off this month. Workers were only offered one month's pay. Police and security guards clashed with workers when the factory gates were forced open and workers entered the plant's offices.

Kader has agreed to renew its contracts with some senior employees and to pay terminated employees compensation and bonuses in accordance with labour laws. At least 67,000 factories have closed in China this year, with 7,000 of these in Dongguan.

Another taxi drivers' strike in China

Taxi drivers in Hongjiang, Hunan province, returned to work on November 25, ending a two-day strike without resolving grievances. The protest started on Monday, when all 80 licensed taxis in the small city stopped outside the Hongjiang city government building to demand reduced rental fees and taxes, extended license periods and for the government to pay insurance.

City authorities refused to give ground on the issues but agreed to file a report with the provincial government to increase the taxi license period to eight years.

Taxi strikes have broken out in six cities across China in recent weeks against high fuel prices and rising rental fees. On November 24, cab drivers and police clashed in Guangzhou city following the alleged beating of a driver by a man who claimed to be a government official.

Bosch India strike enters 10th day

An indefinite strike by auto parts workers at Bosch India's Jaipur plant entered its 10th day on November 19. Production at the plant is down by 86 percent, costing the company 3 million rupees (\$US60,180) per day. Supervisory and managerial employees have been forced to work the assembly lines.

The Mico Bosch Labour Union called the strike after management implemented cost-cutting measures and retrenched 118 workers and 59 apprentices. The union is demanding reinstatement and pay parity with Bosch's other plants in Nasik, Bangalore, Naganathapura (near Bangalore) and Goa.

The dispute has been referred to the Joint Labour Commissioner in Jaipur.

Walkout at Dunlop in India enters second week

Dunlop India Ltd tyre workers struck at the company's Sahagunj plant in West Bengal on November 17 demanding 25,000 rupees for outstanding wages. Employees claim that the Ruia Group, which acquired and reopened the plant in 2006, has only paid 5,000 rupees per employee on a promised 30,000-rupee back-pay deal.

A West Bengal Indian National Trade Union Congress spokesman said that the company has offered a 2,000-rupee monthly allowance for the next three months but this was rejected by the workers, who fear management is planning to close the plant.

Agricultural workers strike at Tamilnadu university

About 800 farm workers in Tamilnadu Agricultural University (TNAU) in Coimbatore have been on strike since November 23 over wages and employment security. They want a review of their wages, which are currently paid at the 2005 minimum rate, and for the university to fulfil a

government directive to bring 1,072 casual labourers under a "regular-time" pay scale.

University authorities claim that they are paying legally correct wages but have sent a new proposal to the government on the casual labourers.

College staff strike in Pakistan

Teaching and non-teaching staff at colleges across the Sindh province struck on November 26 over the physical abuse of ad-hoc lecturers by police during a demonstration outside the Sindh Assembly on Monday. The Monday protest was to demand regularisation of employment at the colleges. The Sindh Professors and Lecturers Association organised the strike and planned to meet in Hyderabad the next day to discuss further action.

Sacked Nikon workers in Thailand rally

Two hundred sub-contracting employees of Nikon (Thailand) Company in the Rojana Industrial Estate in Uthai district protested outside the provincial labour office on November 24 to demand company executives, sub-contracting firms and workers representatives negotiate better compensation. Around 1,500 sub-contract workers were laid off last week. They claim that they were given no warning and that the severance pay is 33 percent less than the legal requirement.

Meanwhile, the Employees' Labour Development Council of Thailand has received complaints from staff at the sub-contracting firms after they were told to sign resignation letters. They were told Nikon planned to cut the number of sub-contracted workers by at least 2,000. If they resign voluntarily they will not receive the full severance pay of three months' salary.

Nikon established the production base at Rojana Industrial Estate in 1990. It hired 8,000 permanent staff and 4,000 sub-contracted staff at four factories. A Nikon labour union official predicted that the company firm would lay off another 2,600 sub-contract workers this week as a result of the economic slowdown.

Indonesian workers demonstrate over minimum wage

Thousands of workers in the West Banbung industrial area, West Java, took to the streets November 24 over low wages being proposed by the West Banbung Remuneration Council. The rally caused a 10-kilometre traffic jam on the Padalarang highway.

Talks between employer representatives, wanting the minimum monthly

wage restricted to 1,002,500 rupiah (\$US88.9), and the Remuneration Council, which is made up of workers, academics and government officials who want it fixed higher, have reached a deadlock. A National Workers Union spokesman at the rally said workers reject both proposals and want the minimum monthly wage to match the cost of living, which is 1,166,000 rupiah.

Hundreds of workers in Bekasi municipality and regency demonstrated at the governor's offices in Bandung to oppose a minimum wage scheme approved by the West Java Governor on November 21. They claimed the scheme is unfair because it fails to correctly categorise workers.

In East Java, workers rallied outside the Mojokerto local administration office on November 25 to demand the government revoke a joint ministerial decree limiting minimum wage rises. The decree strips local administrations of their power to set minimum pay rates.

TAFE teachers in Victoria strike for better pay

About 2,000 striking TAFE (tertiary and further education) teachers met at Hisense Arena in Melbourne on November 25 to demand the Victorian government reduce staff casualisation and improve salaries. Dozens of classes were cancelled and several metropolitan campuses closed in the second state-wide TAFE strike this year. Teachers later marched to state parliament.

Negotiations on a new agreement came to a halt in September, prompting rolling stoppages. The Australian Education Union want a \$13,000 (\$US8,670) pay rise to bring TAFE salaries in line with the state's primary and secondary school teachers and their New South Wales counterparts.

Queensland paramedics get interim pay rise

The Industrial Relations Commission ruled on November 25 that Queensland ambulance officers would be paid an interim pay increase of 4 percent, backdated to the first of October 2008, while their enterprise bargaining agreement is being arbitrated in the commission. The Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union has rejected the state government's offer of 12.5 percent over three years.

Paramedics protested earlier this month outside the state premier's office in Brisbane and held stop-work meetings in regional centres condemning the government offer and calling for an immediate 6 percent pay rise and better working conditions.

New Zealand bus drivers return to work

Around 50 drivers at Go Bus in Hamilton ended five days of industrial action on November 25 after reaching a settlement in a pay dispute. National Distribution Union members had previously taken 24-hour strike action and were planning to not collect fares on returning to work. Management locked them out and maintained services using administrative staff and non-unionised drivers.

Drivers, who earn \$NZ13.50 an hour, wanted a 26 percent pay rise but returned to work accepting the company's original offer of 5.6 percent.

Auckland retail workers protest

Several hundred workers from the Farmers retail chain, supported by employees from other retail groups, marched up Queen St in Auckland on November 21 protesting the company's offer of a 20 cents per hour pay increase. The National Distribution Union (NDU) timed the protest a week before the official annual Farmers Xmas Parade.

A group of striking workers from McDonald's stores joined the parade in an act of solidarity. Unite union has had nearly 50 strikes in McDonald's stores for better pay and conditions.

Public servants in French Polynesia end 15-day strike

French Polynesian public sector workers began returning to work on November 26 after a 15-day strike failed to defer reforms to the French pension system. The strike closed public schools, customs and courthouse offices, restricted police department and treasury office operations and closed the port in Tahiti's capital, Papeete. A street blockade outside the French high commission prevented the commissioner leaving the country.

Legislation approved this week in the French parliament will cut pensions in its overseas territories. Retired public servants in the territories are entitled to a 75 percent top-up on their pensions to compensate for high consumer prices, which are often 300 percent higher than in France. The reform will reduce the amount of the top-up.

Public sector unions said they will test the legality of the changes in the French Supreme Court, while the French Polynesian assembly leaders have sent a joint letter to the French President Nicolas Sarkozy asking for a suspension of the reform for a year.

Television workers in French Polynesia strike

Employees at the public broadcaster RFO in Tahiti struck on November 24 for 48 hours in protest against the government's plan to stop advertising

on all French public service television. Unions at the network fear a loss of revenue and service. Television news broadcasts were cancelled for two days.

Hospital workers in French Polynesia plan to strike

Trade unions at four hospitals in French Polynesia last week announced a scheduled strike for November 26. The unions and hospital management are negotiating on 20 union demands, including personnel reclassification, late indemnity payments and internal transfers.

Tahiti hotel strike ends

Workers at the Sheraton Hotel Tahiti returned to work on November 21, ending a five-day strike that had forced management to transfer guests to other hotels. The strike ended after union officials and management reached an agreement on separation pay for 18 employees laid off for economic reasons.

A management spokesman said that due to Tahiti's struggling tourism industry they are proposing early retirements, reclassifications and the elimination of fixed-term contracts for employees. The union is not opposing any lay-offs.



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