

# 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.*

## Shanghai electronics workers protest closures

Hundreds of workers demonstrated outside the Shanghai Yi Hsin and Zhan Hsin electronic factories on December 10, claiming that the plants had halted production and laid-off employees without paying overdue wages. Workers had been calling for meetings with management for several days.

The companies offered to retrain the employees and transfer them to other plants but workers rejected this, demanding that they first be paid overdue bonuses and overtime pay.

## Chinese milk drivers strike

Around 50 drivers and warehousemen from the Sanyuan-Sojitz Logistics Company in Beijing struck on December 13 over changed working hours. Deliveries of milk products to the Changping, Shunyi and Chaoyang districts were disrupted. The company hired vans from outside but failed to break the strike.

Drivers claim that their workload doubled with no additional pay after a recent change in management personnel. Repeated approaches to management failed to resolve the issue, forcing some workers to resign. The remaining drivers have threatened to take the dispute to the labour department for arbitration if there is no satisfactory settlement.

## Japanese workers rally against job cuts

About 200 people rallied outside the headquarters of the Nippon

Keidanren—Japan's largest business lobby group—in Tokyo's main business district on December 16 to protest massive job cuts in recent weeks. Protesters chanted, "Toyota, stop cutting seasonal workers! We workers are not disposable!" and "Sony, stop massive firing!"

Sony has announced plans to slash about 5 percent of its global work force and lowered its full-year earnings projection 59 percent from the previous year. Major automakers, including Toyota and Nissan, have terminated contracts with thousands of seasonal workers at their factories and parts plants.

Speakers at the rally, which was organised by the New Japan Womens Association, said newly unemployed contract workers had also lost their company-owned housing, leaving them jobless and homeless. Union speakers said more than 18,800 people, mostly contract workers, have been sacked.

Japanese exporters have been hit by plummeting international consumer demand and the yen's appreciation, which has eroded export earnings.

## Indian university teachers on strike

Teachers at seven universities in India began indefinite strike action on December 15 over government delays in finalising a pay rise for university and college teachers.

The Federation of Central Universities Teachers Association said its members plan to march on the Indian parliament and will maintain the strike until an announcement is made on their pay revision.

## Punjab bus drivers strike

Public transport employees across India's Punjab state struck for 24 hours on December 16 after talks failed with the Principal Secretary of Transport. Workers want 360 Punjab buses to be merged into Punjab Roadways, 300 additional buses, promotions in all categories, the filling of all vacant posts, restoration of overtime and an end to forcing drivers to pay compensation if involved in accidents.

The strike was organised by the All India Trade Union Congress and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

### **School cooks in Karnataka rally for pay rise**

Hundreds of school midday meal cooks demonstrated outside the Deputy Commissioner's office in Gulbarga city, India, on December 16 demanding a pay rise. The Samata Sainik Dal, which organised the demonstration, wants increases of between 1,100 and 1,650 rupees per month. School cooks currently earn between 400 and 850 rupees (\$US8 and \$17) per month.

### **Sri Lankan nurses maintain boycott**

National Cancer Hospital nurses in Maharagama, Colombo have been boycotting chemotherapy treatments since December 10, over pay and safety. Their demands include a 10,000-rupee (\$US91) monthly allowance, proper training and appropriate protective equipment for chemotherapy treatments.

The more than 330 nurses claim that no oncologists or nurses at the hospital have been given special training for chemotherapy as laid down in national standards. The nurses' demands date back to 1996.

### **Philippine garment workers demand termination pay**

Almost 100 displaced workers of the now defunct Sapphire Philippines garment factory in the Philippine Export Processing Zone Authority (PEZA) in Rosario picketed the zone administrator's office on December 16 to demand that their union be consulted on the sale of factory assets. Pickets were maintained inside the PEZA compound and outside the main gates.

The union claimed that the plant employed 300 when it closed in January 2007 but PEZA's list of workers to be compensated has grown to 640 names, effectively halving the payout to the Sapphire workers. PEZA administrators finally agreed to consult with the union on the list.

### **Thai auto parts workers strike**

Over 1,000 employees of auto-parts manufacturer Yarnapund Public Co in Bang Phli city, Samut Prakarn, struck on December 12 for a pay rise, a

bonus equivalent to four months' salary, and other demands. They rallied on the King Kaew Road, blocking traffic.

The workers also want the removal of three company executives, establishment of a company labour union and permanent employee status for all those with more than one year's service.

The strike ended when the police and local administrator convinced workers to accept a two months' salary bonus and a company promise not to punish anyone involved in the strike. None of the other issues were resolved.

### **Vietnamese crane manufacturing workers end dispute**

Around 1,300 Doosan Vina Company employees ended a week-long strike on December 11, following management promises to improve working conditions. The South Korean-owned crane and pressure tank manufacturer is in the Dung Quat Economic Zone.

The strikers said Doosan Vina had not honoured promises to pay various allowances and wage rises once employees completed four months' service. They also complained that they had been subjected to numerous beatings and insults at the plant.

The company has agreed to establish a labour union, improve food quality, guarantee safety and "behave better with employees". Management claims it will consider pay increases and allowances at a later date.

### **Telstra workers begin national rolling-strikes**

Thousands of Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members at Telstra, Australia's largest telecommunications provider, began rolling four-hour strikes on December 16, for a wage rise, better conditions and for unions to negotiate on their behalf. The CPSU members include Telstra's white-collar staff—customer sales, IT and business management.

Staff at the Clayton global centre in Melbourne, who work on transmission problems across Australia, struck for 48 hours. Three days earlier, linesman and technicians from the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) implemented a 48-hour ban on overtime and recall duty. CEPU spokesman John Ellery said it was the first time in 10 years that Telstra employees had walked out.

Thousands of Telstra network construction technicians were due to take industrial action on Thursday and yesterday.

Telstra has repeatedly refused to negotiate new collective agreements with the CEPU, CPSU and APESMA (Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers) over the past 12 months, while offering employees individual non-union agreements.

### **South Australian teachers rally over funding**

About 200 public school teachers demonstrated outside the South Australian Premier Mike Rann's office on December 15 as part of their ongoing campaign for more state funding. Australian Education Union (AEU) president Correna Haythorpe said more rallies are planned.

A pay and conditions dispute between the state government and the AEU is currently before the Industrial Relations Commission. AEU members want an 18 percent pay rise over three years. The Labor government has offered only 14.2 percent.

Ports of Auckland—NZ's largest container facility port—is fully owned by Auckland Regional Holdings, the commercial arm of Auckland Regional Council. Ports management said it was considering the union's proposal.



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### **NSW prison officers stop work**

Prison officers at the high-security Cessnock Jail in New South Wales (NSW) stopped work for two hours on December 17 over state government plans to privatise the facility. Tony Howen, the prison officers' union delegate at Cessnock, says the government plans will lead to job cuts and reduced conditions.

Several hundred striking prison officers protested outside state parliament last October against moves to allow private operators to run Cessnock and Parklea prisons.

### **New Zealand Masport workers approve pay offer**

An indefinite strike involving more than 70 workers at lawnmower manufacturer Masport has ended after workers voted on December 11 to accept a pay offer. Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU) and Moulders Union members at Masport's manufacturing plant in Auckland walked off the job last week in response to a 3 percent pay offer—2 percent below New Zealand's annual inflation rate.

The improved offer included a 4 percent pay increase plus 1 percent over 15 months, as well as an improvement to overtime rates.

### **NZ Maritime Union puts proposal to end port dispute**

The New Zealand Maritime Union (MUNZ) has presented Ports of Auckland bosses with a proposal to end their contract dispute. No details have been released.

More than 300 ports staff struck for 24 hours on December 2, rejecting management's last offer, which included four collective employment agreements to replace a single agreement. Other issues of concern are the removal of some allowances, and plans to use more casual workers on the first two days of the week, forcing permanent staff to work more weekends.