

# 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.

## **Kashmir government employees strike**

All government and semi-government offices in Kashmir were shut down on December 30 after employees launched a one-day strike to demand benefits recommended by the Sixth Pay Commission. The recommendations include regularisation of daily wage and ad hoc workers, a merger of the Cost of Living Allowance into the Dearness Allowance, Housing Rent Allowance on par with central government employees, and the retirement age of government employees increased from 58 to 60 years.

The Employees Joint Consultation Committee (JCC) wants these benefits extended to all local and municipal government employees and other public sector workers.

## **Tamil Nadu handloom weavers on strike**

Handloom weavers in Kumbakonam and Thirubuvanam began indefinite strike action on December 28 to demand the government import subsidised cheaper raw materials.

Silk weavers in Salem district walked out on December 29 to protest steep increases in the price of local pure silk yarn, which has doubled in the last year. Weavers from Kondalampatti, Nangavalli, Vanavasi, Mecheri and various other parts of Salem district demonstrated.

The weavers also urged the Central and State Governments to boost silk manufacture by increasing subsidies to silk worm producers.

## **Colgate Palmolive workers in India on strike**

Workers at Colgate Palmolive's Aurangabad tooth-powder factory struck on December 26. Workers are demanding the reinstatement of two colleagues who were dismissed on disciplinary grounds and for a charter of demands including higher wages.

A spokesman for the Aurangabad Unit of Centre of Indian Trade Unions said that workers had been forced to strike because the company refused to reinstate their sacked colleagues. The factory employs 87 people and produces about 12 tonnes of toothpowder a day.

## **Indian university staff demonstrate**

University teachers and non-teaching staff at the North Eastern Hill University in Shillong, Meghalaya demonstrated on December 29 to demand the university administration reinstate a special 12 percent additional allowance on basic salaries. The teachers' Joint Action Committee is demanding that the vice-chancellor step down, claiming he illegally removed the allowance.

## **Pakistan CNG filling station workers and owners on strike**

Compressed liquid gas (CNG) filling stations in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad closed indefinitely on December 31 in protest against the government's gas load management plan and an increase in gas tariffs. Retailers also want exemption from a government imposed two-day a week gas holidays and for CNG prices to remain at half of the cost of petrol.

At least half of the cities' public transport services, as well as all taxis and vans, use CNG. All Pakistan CNG Association Chairman Ghayas Abdullah Piracha told the media that CNG stations across the country would remain closed until their demands were met.

## **Taiwan unions protest**

About 500 members of ten labour unions protested outside the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) headquarters in Taipei on December 30 against a proposed amendment to the Labor Union Law which gives the government authority to disband unions and restrict their membership. The demonstrators also called for the government to honour promises to give the unions more authority over labour affairs and to supervise their own finances.

Four protest leaders were detained by police after workers mobbed KMT officials' cars as they tried to leave the headquarters.

### **Sri Lankan health workers walk out**

Around 1,000 workers from 117 health establishments, including base hospitals, provincial hospitals and dispensaries in Ampara, Eastern Province, walked off the job for half a day on December 23 to demand over-time and transport allowances that have been unpaid for the last four months. The protesting workers included medical officers, nurses and minor staff. Only emergency services were maintained during the strike.

### **Sri Lankan volunteer teachers demonstrate**

Volunteer teachers from schools in war-torn areas of the Eastern Province demonstrated outside the provincial ministry in Trincomalee on December 22. Their main demand is for job permanency. The volunteer teachers accused the government of making false promises and threatened to launch a hunger strike if their demands were not addressed.

### **Stranded sailors in Vietnam on hunger strike**

Russian sailors from two fishing vessels—the Phuhai-1 and Phuhai-7—in Vietnam began a hunger strike on December 21 to demand that they be returned home and for the payment of salaries outstanding for the past eight months. The sailors are all residents of Russia's Far East. Crews from another five vessels, which are registered in Belize and Vietnam, are facing similar difficulties.

The owner of the Phuhai-1 and Phuhai-7 claimed that he was withholding the sailors pay because of financial problems caused by the global economic crisis but refused to say when the crews would be paid.

### **Casino workers strike over pay**

Star City casino dealers in Sydney were locked out by management after more than 200 staff members, including chefs, croupiers and housekeepers, began rolling strikes on Friday. The striking workers, who protested outside the casino on Saturday, decided to take industrial action after overwhelmingly rejecting a 7.5 percent pay rise over three years from the company. The latest offer, which does not include back pay, is just 0.5 percent better than one made to employees in July.

Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union president Jim Lloyd told the media that the management had refused to consider further increasing the offer and that workers were being paid less than other sections of the industry. The casino increased its last quarter revenue by 11.6 percent.

### **Western Australian aged-care workers hold strike ballot**

Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU) members at 13 Hall & Prior aged care centres in Western Australia voted during the Christmas-New Year period on whether to strike in support of an outstanding pay claim. The union has been negotiating with the company for 12 months for a 16.5 percent pay rise over three years. Hall & Prior has only offered nine percent.

An LHMU official predicted that the aged-care workers would vote to strike. Results of the ballot are not expected until January 20 with possible strike action occurring by the end of the month.

### **PNG maritime workers to vote for strike**

The Maritime and Transport Workers Union (MTWU) announced last week that it will hold a secret ballot of its 4,000 members for strike action at all major Papua New Guinea docks. Union president John Mahuk said a stoppage could be averted if Steamships Shipping and other stevedoring employers implemented a 6 percent wage increase previously agreed in July 2009. The agreement included a pay increase back-dated to January 2009 for all stevedoring and maritime workers.

Steamships Shipping has now refused to sign the deal, declaring that it wants a "flexible hours of work" clause and the agreement extended from 12 months to two years. This would leave workers without a pay rise for 2010 and 2011.



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