

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.

Bangladeshi coal miners on strike

On February 2, over 1,000 contract miners at the state-owned Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Ltd in Dinajpur began an indefinite strike to demand an increased “profit bonus”. Output at the company’s mine has been cut by 60 percent and severely affected coal supplies to the adjacent Power Development Board’s 250MW plant.

Robiul Islam, president of Barapukuria coal mine workers union, told reporters that employees of CMC, the Chinese contractor, wanted 30,000 taka (\$US438) for each miner as “profit-bonus” but authorities had only agreed to pay 4,200 taka. Workers had placed their claim with mine authorities in November and have said they would remain on strike until it was met.

Indian university teachers strike

On January 28, 10,000 members of the Federation of Central University Teachers’ Associations at 35 universities in New Delhi struck for two days to demand changes in work regulations that link their promotion to output. Teachers claimed the new regulations, prepared and approved by the University Grants Commission, will force teachers to pay more attention to other activities, rather than concentrating on quality teaching.

Gujarat University workers call hunger strike

After repeated approaches to administrators, 167 clerical and administrative employees at Gujarat University in Ahmedabad called an indefinite hunger strike from February 3 to demand full implementation of

the Sixth Pay Commission.

One affected worker told the media, “We have written letters to the authorities, sent numerous applications, even sat on dharnas (sit-down protests) and organised agitations, but everything fell on deaf ears.” The workers are claiming discrimination, pointing out that other university employees are being paid in accordance with the commission’s recommendations.

Tamil Nadu explosives workers on strike

At least 80 striking administrative and technical employees of Tamil Nadu Industrial Explosives Limited in Katpadi staged a demonstration at the factory this week to push for a pay rise. Workers began strike action on January 27 to demand salaries as per the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations.

Andhra Pradesh jute mill workers protest

On February 3, 5,000 displaced workers from Chittivalasa Jute Mills in Visakhapatnam held a procession in the city and then marched to the Collectorate (government offices) to demand reopening of the mill. Management closed the jute mill in April 2009, citing power problems as the reason. In August state parliament ordered the mill to be reopened but management obtained a stay order from the courts.

The displaced workers, who have been fasting since February 1, are organised by the Joint Action Committee of Trade Unions, which includes three peak union organisations: Indian National Trade Union Congress, Centre of Indian Trade Unions and All India Trade Union Congress.

Indonesian port workers protest

On February 1, 500 contract IT and clerical workers at PT Jakarta

International Container Terminal (JICT) protested at Tanjung Priok Port's main gate in North Jakarta to demand permanent employee status. According to Sutimanto, chairman of the JICT contract worker association, the workers were paid 1.3 million rupiah (\$US140) a month, far below permanent employees who earn up to 13 million rupiah monthly.

"We have been working at the firm's main division for 15 to 20 years, but have yet to be made permanent employees," Sutimanto said. JICT has threatened to terminate the workers if they do not sign outsourcing contracts.

Indonesian television workers protest

On February 3, hundreds of PT Direct Vision employees protested outside parliament in Jakarta to demand the Labor Commission intervene in a dispute over unpaid wages. The cable television workers claim that 204 employees have not been paid for the past four months after the parent company, Lippo, shut down junior broadcaster Astro TV in October during a dispute with Astro Malaysia over broadcasting rights.

Philippines airline union files strike notice

The Philippine Airlines Employees Association has filed a notice of strike with the Department of Labor (DoL) over the airline's planned staff restructure. The company announced in August that it intended to cut costs by outsourcing services that will affect 3,900 employees in ground-handling, maintenance and cargo operations. A DoL official said talks with the airline were due to commence on February 4.

Sydney casino workers strike again

Star City casino workers were locked out last weekend, the second time in a month, after taking industrial action for a new work agreement. Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) members, including chefs, croupiers, housekeepers and security, are protesting the casino's latest 7.5 percent pay increase offer over three years. The offer is just 0.5 percent above a deal rejected in July last year by 1,200 employees.

In July, after four months of negotiations, Star City management offered a pay increase of 1.5 percent in 2009, 2.5 percent in 2010 and 3 percent in 2011, with no back pay. Management also wants the guaranteed dealer-career progression removed from the current enterprise agreement and the rate of sick-leave accrual reduced.

According to the LHMU, workers are planning escalating action at the

casino in the lead-up to Chinese New Year.

Australian maritime union calls off strike after deal

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), which covers workers at Total Marine Services (TMS) in Western Australia, has called off a 48-hour stoppage planned for February 1 after reaching agreement with the employer on a new pay deal. TMS has agreed to a 30 percent wage increase that comprises 8.5 percent back-dated to September last year; 3.5 percent from this month; and three 6 percent wage rises payable between July this year and July 2012. The company also agreed to pay a new construction allowance which will start at about \$175 (\$US152) a day before increasing to \$214 a day.

The dispute at TMS is part of an MUA campaign begun in November for new work agreements with shipping companies that service oil and gas field projects off the Western Australian coast in the North West Shelf, the Timor Sea and Bass Strait. The union said it was close to securing agreements with other vessel operators, including Farstad and Go Offshore.

PNG maritime union rejects pay offer

While the ballot result for strike action over an improved work agreement for 4,000 Papua New Guinea maritime workers is still to be announced, the Maritime and Transport Workers Union (MTWU) has rejected the employers latest pay offer. The MTWU is demanding Steamships Shipping and other stevedoring companies implement a 6 percent wage rise agreed last July. The agreement included a pay increase back-dated to January 2009.

Steamships Shipping has since refused to sign the deal and offered a 1.5 percent pay rise from January 1 this year but without any increase for 2009. The company also wanted the working week increased from 37 to 40 hours without an additional three hours' pay.

Employers have now agreed to withdraw demands for a three-hour increase in the working week. They also confirmed an earlier agreement between the union and the Employers Federation for paid maternity leave for female stevedoring workers, to lift the casual stevedoring loading to 26 percent, and for the heavy-duty allowance to be increased to 10 kina (\$US3.70) per week.

Stevedoring employers, however, have again rejected the 6 percent wage claim and want to reduce the wage rise to 3 percent, with 1.5 percent effective from December 2007 and another 1.5 percent a year later and no increase for 2010. MTWU president John Mahuk said the secret ballot for industrial action was almost complete and that the result would be announced later this week.



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