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*.

India: Factory official dies in clash with employees

A company official sustained fatal injuries and many workers were injured in a clash between Allied Nippon management and employees at the company's Site IV Link Road factory in Delhi on November 13. Allied Nippon manufactures auto brake-shoes.

The clash occurred after management and security guards brandishing firearms attempted to stop workers striking in protest over the dismissal of seven contract workers. The workers were also demanding a change in shift work arrangements.

According to an Allied Nippon labour union official, management aggressively confronted the workers and "suddenly some [management] officials opened fire." Other witnesses told the media that the workers were acting in self defence when the management official was injured.

Ganesh Dutt Joshi, a labourer who was admitted to Yashoda Multispecialty Hospital with minor injuries, told the media: "Management is insensitive towards our demands for reinstatement of sacked labourers. They are yet to give us the Diwali bonus. We feel exploited. We were planning to begin strike action on November 16 but management forced us not to go on the strike."

When the factory reopened on November 17, company officials provocatively demanded that 30 regular workers explain why they should not be dismissed. Despite the seriousness of the provocations, the Allied Nippon labour union and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions have not mobilised other workers in Delhi to support the auto-parts employees.

Rajasthan rural workers end seven-week sit-in

Landless agricultural workers from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) have ended a seven-week sit-in at Jaipur city's State Circle after the Rajasthan state government agreed to five of their six demands.

This includes linking MGNREGS wages with the state's minimum wage, regular pay increases in line with the consumer price index, the right to form a registered union, compensation for late wage payments and improved methods for recording daily working hours. The protest was organised by the Right to Information and Employment Abhiyan.

South Korean riot police attack striking Hyundai workers

Over 20 workers were injured and 50 arrested on November 15 when riot police using tear-gas attacked 300 striking subcontract workers at the Hyundai Motor factory in Ulsan, 400 kilometres south of Seoul. Hyundai Motor Irregular Workers Association members dispersed and regrouped at a nearby building to continue their protest for formal employee status at the country's largest automaker.

The strike action follows a High Court ruling on November 12 directing the automaker to transform in-house subcontractors who have worked at the plant for more than two years into official Hyundai employees.

Hyundai has rejected the court ruling and plans to appeal against the decision. Over 1,900 in-house subcontractors filed a suit on November 4 demanding they be recognised as Hyundai employees. South Korea has an estimated 5.3 million "non-regular" or temporary workers who are denied the same rights and entitlements as permanent employees.

China: Striking Sanyo workers attacked by police

Over a thousand Sanyo Huaqiang Laser Electronics employees in Shenzhen's Longhua district walked off the job for 24 hours on November 10 over working conditions and a planned merger with another factory in an adjacent district. The strikers were beaten and two were arrested by riot police who were called in to break up the protest. The strike ended after management agreed to negotiate.

The walkout erupted after the company reportedly told employees they would lose their jobs unless they agreed to transfer to Sanyo's main factory in Meilin district. The workers were also protesting over the recent quadrupling of prices at the company's canteen after Sanyo increased salaries to the official monthly minimum wage of 1,100 yuan ($US151).

Workers were also angry over social security and medical insurance contributions being calculated on the basic wage and not on workers' total salaries, women workers being paid between one-half and two-thirds of their male counterparts' salaries, and substandard conditions in women's dormitories.

Pakistani workers rally over salary delays

Pakistan Railway workers protested outside the Peshawar Cantt Railway Station this week in protest over the late payment of Eid festival holiday salaries. The rally spilled over onto the track and blocked the Awam Express which was bound for Karachi. Railway administrators claim they

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do not have enough money to make the payment.

Cambodian court orders garment workers to end strike

More than 600 striking workers from the PY garment factory in Sihanoukville returned to work on November 13 following a court directive. The garment workers walked off the job and protested outside the factory on November 4 to demand improved pay and conditions. Although the company agreed to their demands, workers decided to remain on strike until management reinstated their sacked union leaders. PY management told workers that their sacked colleagues would not be reinstated and threatened to sack all strikers unless they returned to work.

The provincial labour department has submitted a case to the Arbitration Council for resolution of the sacking of union leader Mao Piseth and another colleague who company administrators claim were fired for swearing at a manager.

Indonesian workers protest labour laws

Hundreds of workers in North Sumatra rallied outside the governor's office in Medan on November 10 to demand immediate implementation of the National Social Security System Law, which should have been put into effect last year. The law includes provision of health insurance for all Indonesian workers. Demonstrators also condemned a recent revision of manpower laws which allow employers to lay off workers arbitrarily and to sue strikers.

On the same day, hundreds of workers demonstrated outside Batam municipal council in the Riau Islands over a revised manpower law. Indonesian Metal Workers Union head Agus Sriyono told demonstrators that Law No. 13/2003 eliminated employees' rights, including legislation on contract workers and employment termination. "The law [revision] stipulates that companies can [now] employ contractual workers to do their main work," he said.

Queensland health workers continue wage campaign

Over 50 health professionals at the Ipswich regional hospital held a lunchtime protest on November 11 as part of a three-month pay dispute with the Queensland Labor government. Rolling stoppages were held at Rockhampton, Gladstone, Bundaberg and Hervey Bay hospitals earlier in the week.

The Public Sector Union (PSU) and the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union want a 12.5 percent pay rise over three years. The state government has refused to increase its offer of 7.5 percent over the same period.

PSU officials have told the media that rolling stoppages will continue "until we get some attention from the [health] minister." An audiologist at the Ipswich Hospital told the media: "Trying to give us a pay rise less than inflation while stripping our conditions is disrespectful."

Brisbane construction workers picket City Hall

Up to 400 construction workers at the Brisbane City Hall refurbishment picketed the site on Wednesday last week to protest pay and conditions. The construction workers have defied a Fair Work Australia directive to end their protest and stopped all work at the site because asbestos-removal at the project was not being handled in accordance with safety standards.

Electrical Trade Union (ETU) members first walked off the job on November 10 when representatives from Abigroup contractors stormed into an on-site union meeting over the issue and threatened to sack workers if the meeting continued. The ETU has accused Abigroup of using labour hire companies that under-pay its employees between $6 and $14 less per hour than workers at other city work sites.

Abigroup has issued a statement demanding an end to the strike and claiming that all asbestos will be removed by licensed contractors. A City Hall spokesman said restoration work will be put on hold pending an independent safety audit.

Brisbane garbage collection workers ordered to end strike

More than 130 employees from SITA Environmental Solutions in Brisbane have been ordered back to work by Fair Work Australia after walking off the job on Wednesday in protest over the sacking of a driver accused of having "too many accidents." A Transport Workers Union spokesman said the accidents were caused by SITA's unrealistic productivity demands. Although the driver has not been reinstated, TWU state secretary Hughie Williams claimed that the FWA return-to-work order was a victory. The union has not proposed any industrial action to secure reinstatement of the sacked driver.

Bunnings hardware workers vote for strike

Frame and truss employees at Bunnings' workshops in Benalla and Hallam in Victoria and Warnervale in NSW have voted to take legal industrial action, including strikes, for a new work agreement. Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members want a pay rise of 13.5 percent over three years. The hardware giant Bunnings has only offered 10.5 percent over the same period.

A CFMEU spokesperson said Warnervale members planned to stop work on Friday, with further rolling stoppages planned up until the end of December. Talks between the company and the union are ongoing.

New Zealand: Radiographers vote on pay deal

The Association of Professionals and Executive Employees (Apex), representing 1,000 Medical Radiation Technologists (MRTs) in public hospitals across New Zealand, has suspended all industrial action, which included strikes and work bans, while its members vote by postal ballot on a new District Health Boards (DHBs) pay offer.

The DHBs have offered a 2.5 percent pay rise over two years and three months—well below next year's expected 6 percent inflation rate—adjustments to on-call rates, travel expenses and paid parental leave. Apex has been in negotiations with DHBs since August 2009 over a new collective agreement. MRTs have taken part in rolling industrial stoppages since February.

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Gas and power-line engineers announce strike

The Engineering Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU), representing 230 Tenix Group employees who maintain the electrical and gas network in Wellington, has issued a notice to strike, following a breakdown in negotiations for a new work agreement. Tenix wants to reduce superannuation contributions from 8 percent to 2 percent and change rules on working hours.

Industrial action will commence on November 30 and will include a ban on overtime, callout and standby arrangements.

Secondary school teachers resume industrial action

Secondary school teachers across New Zealand have resumed industrial action that will cause the cancellation of Year 9 classes on November 18 and December 1, and year 10 classes on November 23. The Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) suspended strike action last week as a pre-condition requested by the ministry of education to allow negotiations for a new work contract to resume. Bargaining broke down, however, after the ministry offered to only conduct talks on the effect of overlarge class sizes.

Last month, the PPTA rejected a pay offer of 0.5 percent and a $1,000 one-off payment for the first year, and 1.9 percent for the second year. Teachers want a 4 percent pay increase and a commitment by the ministry to address increasing class sizes through teacher retention and recruitment. However, PPTA President Kate Gainsford has indicated the union is willing to compromise. She told the media last month that this was not a “take it or leave it” demand.

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