

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

15 January 2011

## China: Striking Shenzhen bus workers attacked by riot police

Several bus drivers and conductors were hospitalised in a clash with police on January 10 after more than 100 workers walked off the job and picketed a bus depot in Shenzhen over a wage dispute. The strike erupted after management refused to meet workers to discuss pay anomalies and instead called the police, who turned up along with anti-riot forces who attempted to force the strikers back to work.

Workers said problems arose after the bus depot was taken over by another company and imposed an incomprehensible wage system. "Nobody knows how their individual wage is calculated. If you do more shifts it is the same as doing fewer shifts," one worker alleged.

## India: Uttar Pradesh university workers' strike enters second month

As many as 100 university workers of Gautam Buddh Technical University (GBTU) in Lucknow have been on strike since December 13 to demand regularisation of employment. On Monday, strikers locked the main gate and vowed to continue until their demands were met. The GBTU Staff Association ended strike action in April over the same issue after authorities agreed to consider their demand.

The university has demanded that workers undergo a selection process in order to qualify for regularisation. GBTU members have rejected this declaring that they have been serving the university since its inception and should be selected directly.

## Punjab "special needs" teachers protest

Teachers of students with special needs rallied in Ludhiana, Punjab on January 8 to demand improved working conditions and a wage rise. An Inclusive Foundation Volunteers Association official said that teachers' salaries were only 66.5 rupees (\$US1.5) per day, which was reduced to 40 rupees after travel expenses were deducted. The association wants monthly salaries increased from 2,000 rupees to 10,000 rupees and all teachers made permanent.

## Maharashtra public transport workers to walk out

PMT Kamgar Sangh, the union covering Pune public transport service

workers, has issued a 14-day notice of strike and threatened to walk out this week over a pay dispute. PMPML has over 1,000 buses on the road at any one time. The union said it had held demonstrations and a hunger protest over the past 12 months to demand implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations.

## Andhra Pradesh stainless steel utensil workers on strike

Over 1,000 workers in the stainless steel utensil manufacturing zone at Anupparpalayam, Tirupur have been on strike since December 29, after seven rounds of negotiations for a new pay agreement failed. Negotiations between eight registered unions and the manufacturers began in October after the previous 30-month agreement expired. The unions want a 60 percent pay rise and holiday pay but employers are offering only an 18 percent pay increase.

Negotiation representatives are affiliated with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, All India Trade Union Congress, Labour Progressive Front, Hind Mazdoor Sabha, Indian National Trade Union Congress, Anna Thozhilalar Peravai, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sabha and Kamatchi Amman Patra Sangham.

## Andhra Pradesh food processing workers walk out

At least 100 contract workers at the Food Corporation of India (FCI) struck for the day on January 11 and picketed the company's warehouse in Ongole for a nine-point charter of demands. The workers want regularisation of employment, a daily wage increase from 193 to 264 rupees, bonus and overtime rates doubled and the filling of 15,000 vacancies in FCI warehouses across the country.

FCI Workers Union members have threatened to launch indefinite strike action from February 3 if their demands are not met.

## Jharkhand tourist bus drivers strike

One hundred bus drivers employed by a private agency operating tourist buses for the Jharkhand State Tourism Development Corporation in Dhanbad walked off the job on Tuesday for the second time in two months to demand payment of wages. Drivers alleged that they have not been paid their wages for the last two months. The employer claims that the government has not paid the agency enough money for all the drivers'

wages.

### **Tamil Nadu public servants to walk out**

The Tamil Nadu Revenue Officials' Association has threatened to strike from February 1 if the state government fails to accept their charter of 15 demands that includes filling of vacancies and a 30 percent salary increase. According to an association spokesman, staff shortages are forcing the 12,000 revenue officials to work extended hours and sacrifice holidays to complete government projects.

### **Tamil Nadu AIDS health workers protest**

More than 3,000 temporary health care workers employed by the Tamil Nadu State AIDS Control Society for at least ten years have begun a campaign to demand regularisation of their jobs. The protesting workers, including lab technicians, counsellors, nursing assistants, pharmacists and data managers working in various government and private hospitals treating HIV+ and AIDS affected patients, began wearing black armbands from January 11 as a sign of their protest.

The workers have threatened to organise a hunger protest at the state government offices in Chennai on January 30 if their demands are not met.

### **Karnataka domestic workers protest**

Karnataka Domestic Workers' Movement members marched through the streets of Bangalore on January 8 and presented a memorandum of demands to the labour minister. Protesters wore aprons with the message "domestic workers are workers".

Their demands include one day off a week, recognition of domestic work under the unorganised sector, formation of a separate welfare board of domestic workers, compulsory enrolment of all domestic workers with the labour department, and inclusion of domestic workers under the Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment at Workplace Bill.

### **Hong Kong flight attendants begin industrial action**

The Cathay Pacific Airways Flight Attendants' Union has authorised its members to launch work-to-rule action "anytime" to demand a pay rise higher than the 4.5 percent offered by management. Cathay has refused to hold further talks. On Tuesday, 50 flight attendants protested at the company's headquarters waving placards saying "no talk, no peace".

The union claims the 3,000 cabin crew have been working under a pay freeze for 12 years and that the pay offer is misleading and closer to 1.5 percent when applied to the base salary. Some attendants earn a basic salary as low as \$7,000 (\$US903) per month. Work-to-rule action will include inspecting all hand luggage and checking in all overweight bags, which the union claims will cause delays of at least 15 minutes for each flight.

### **Hong Kong tour guides protest**

Up to 1,000 tour guides rallied at the central government liaison office on Sunday to protest against the Travel Industry Council's (TIC) new directives that will force the guides to manage just one tour group at a time. One protester told the media, "I will lose \$10,000 each month because of this policy".

Another complaint is a new demerit system, which protesters claim is open to corruption because the TIC alone will determine the seriousness of a violation and the number of demerit points to be applied. Guides will be suspended or have their licenses revoked upon reaching 30 demerit points.

### **Victorian waterside workers continue strike action**

Two hundred Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members at Patrick's Webb Dock in Melbourne voted on Wednesday to extend a 48-hour stoppage to 72 hours, after the latest round of negotiations for a new enterprise bargaining agreement with the stevedoring company failed. The strike was part of a national campaign for a pay increase, improved safety and an end to casual employment.

On Monday, 50 Patrick workers in Geelong struck for 24 hours and in December 200 employees at Fremantle and Albany in Western Australia walked out over the dispute.

The MUA wants a 30 percent pay increase over three years, improved safety and an end to casual employment. Three port workers have been killed in fatal accidents in 2010 and 60 percent of Patrick's workforce is employed on a casual basis. Patrick has made no offer in response to the union's 40-point log of claims, despite six months of union negotiations. The previous agreement expired in October.

The MUA has minimised disruption to Patrick's operations by confining the strike to Patrick's Automotive, General and Bulk handling facility at Webb Dock and left operations at the much larger container handling division at Swanson Dock unaffected. The Gillard Labor government's industrial relations laws also require the unions to give three days' notice before going on strike. Patrick told the media that it was able to warn customers of the pending strike and divert ships to other ports.

### **New Zealand medical laboratory union pushes through dismal pay offer**

Acting on their union's advice, medical laboratory workers at 13 District Health Boards (DHBs) and the New Zealand Blood Service have accepted a pay increase of just 2.5 percent over two years. The increase does not keep up with inflation, which is expected to reach 5 percent this year, driven by last October's increase in the goods and services tax (GST) from 12.5 percent to 15 percent. In October, lab workers overwhelmingly rejected an offer of 2 percent over two years.

The Medical Laboratory Workers Union (MLWU), representing 400 workers, called off industrial action in December when the offer was made, even though it was well below the union's initial demand of 5

percent. MLWU spokesman Stewart Smith admitted then that “there were still fundamental issues that needed to be addressed,” but urged members to “accept the new offer because of the difficult economic times.”

The new collective agreement follows 14 months of negotiations during which the MLWU deliberately dragged out the dispute to wear down its members’ resolve. It organised only sporadic short-term strikes and low-level work-to-rule industrial action, while the DHBs viciously attacked workers, suspending up to 30 last August for six hours per day for taking industrial action.



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