

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

19 February 2011

Korean shipbuilding workers locked out

Hanjin Heavy Industries & Construction locked out workers at three shipyards in the south-eastern cities of Busan and Ulsan on February 14 in response to a dispute over job cuts. Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) members have been in conflict with management since December 20 after the company announced plans to cut about 400 jobs.

Up to 190 employees applied for early retirement, but as the deadline for taking up the early-retirement package fell due on Monday, two workers began a crane occupation protest at the Yeondo plant in Busan. Kim Jin-suk, a KCTU official, has been occupying a 50-metre high crane at the same plant since January 16 over the job destruction.

Management responded by closing down its shipyards and locking out its workforce, claiming this was necessary to stop further protests. The company has not announced when the shipyards will reopen. The KTCU told the media that it would continue industrial action until the union's demands were met. Kim Jin-suk has been fined one million won (\$US890) for each day she maintains her crane protest.

Bangladeshi garment workers locked out

More than 6,600 employees at three apparel factories in the Ashulia industrial area in Dhaka were locked out last week after they walked out over outstanding wages and for a pay increase. The Fahimi Group locked out its workforce after 4,000 workers struck over unpaid wages. Management claimed it could not pay January wages before February 15.

Meanwhile, managers of two Italian-owned factories, Helicon Sweaters and A One BD, closed their factories after 2,600 employees walked off the job to demand a pay increase. Large numbers of police were sent to all three disputes to prevent the workers entering the locked premises.

India: Goa water plant workers strike

Thirty-five contract workers at the Podesem water treatment plant in Bicholim, Goa are continuing strike action begun on February 12 to demand salaries due for the past four months and inclusion in a

provident fund. The strikers have been employed on a contract basis for the last eight years and want to be regularised, which would give them extra entitlements.

New Delhi public transport workers strike

More than 500 contract drivers and conductors at the Delhi Transport Corporation refused to work or let buses leave the Millennium Bus Depot on February 14 in a dispute over delayed salary payments. According to strikers, wage payments have been delayed for three months. Their other demands include payment for overtime worked, a wage rise and an end to management's "ill treatment" of workers.

Sri Lankan supplementary medical workers stage national walk-out

Supplementary medical workers, including medical laboratory technologists, pharmacists, radiologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists, held a 24-hour national strike on February 15 over a slate of five demands. This includes promotions, 25 percent professional allowance, filling of vacancies and duty-free vehicle permits. Members of the Joint Council of Professions Supplementary to Medicine have vowed to launch indefinite strike action on February 23 if their claims are not met.

Pakistan International Airline employees end strike

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) resumed domestic and international flights last Saturday after a four-day strike by pilots and ground crew caused the cancellation of more than 500 flights and forced the resignation of managing director Aijaz Haroon. Six sacked pilots who are union representatives will be reinstated.

The Council of Employees of PIA, a confederation representing six different unions, called the strike to protest a code-sharing agreement with Turkish Airlines. The cost-cutting measure allows both airlines to slash jobs and use each other's aircraft, facilities and gain access to cities not already on their network.

PIA has been living on bank borrowings and government bailouts for over a decade. Curbs have been placed on PIA aircraft by the European Union and other regions on several occasions in recent years. The airline was also accused of illegal appointments under former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, and a ticket-sale scandal during the Musharraf regime that cost the airline \$US45 million a year.

Truck drivers hold Australia-wide stoppage

Over 1,500 Transport Workers Union (TWU) members at TNT Australia stopped work for 24 hours on Wednesday and picketed TNT depots nationally over stalled enterprise agreement negotiations. The TWU covers 2,500 workers at TNT, including drivers and dockhands.

Tensions flared at the Enfield depot in Sydney where three strikers were injured when a TNT contractor drove into a picket line and damaged a parked vehicle. A contract driver not involved in the incident told pickets that his boss had told him to “run them over.”

While management and the union have agreed to an 8 percent pay rise over two years, the company has opposed claims for 1 percent annual increases in employers’ superannuation payments until total contributions reach 15 percent. TNT has also rejected demands that it pay matching rates to its 3,000 casual and labour hire employees.

The TWU held four-hour stoppages and imposed loading bans on contract drivers last month.

Western Australian construction workers strike

Construction workers downed tools for a day and picketed a city building site in Perth, Western Australia on Monday over the underpayment of Chinese and Korean workers by Professional Gyprock Solution and Inner City Building Company who employed them on temporary work visas.

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members claim that many of the overseas workers were being paid as little as \$12 an hour and were not being paid levies and entitlements or superannuation payments. According to CFMEU officials, the workers should be paid at least \$28 an hour plus other entitlements.

Tasmanian aged care workers walk out

Carers, food service workers, cleaners and diversional therapy staff from OneCare, a non-profit aged-care provider, struck for four hours at the company’s Kingston and Burnie sites over a new work agreement which slashes working conditions.

The Health and Community Services Union said it had been negotiating with OneCare for over 12 months but the provider was insisting on an agreement that eliminates paid meal breaks and sick leave for non-nursing staff.

New Zealand disability support workers win recognition for full pay

The New Zealand Court of Appeal ruled this week that intellectual disability support workers doing overnight sleepover shifts at institutional premises be paid the adult minimum wage for every hour of their shift. The ruling ends a four-year campaign that involved industrial action and work bans.

The case before the Court of Appeal involved a disability support worker who is employed at a residential house in Horowhenua where four men with intellectual disabilities need 24-hour support. The worker was paid just \$4 an hour for working overnight shifts—a third of the official adult minimum wage of \$12.75 an hour.

The legal action was launched by the Service and Food Workers Union and the Public Service Association in 2007. The unions have not indicated if a claim on back-pay will be made. Over 3,000 disability care workers are employed by the state-funded IHC (Intellectually Handicapped Children), a non-government organisation. In 2010 workers imposed bans on sleepovers and overtime when the IHC imposed a pay freeze.

Papua New guinea teachers end strike without resolution

At least 4,000 public school teachers in the Southern Highlands have ended a week-long strike after being isolated by their union and following government threats that they “would be dealt with” if they failed to resume classes.

The teachers decided not to strike during the new school year because successive governments had failed to grant their demands. The teachers want an increased pay and hardship allowance and the current 6-Kina housing allowance lifted to 100 Kina (\$US38). They are also demanding a 400-Kina allowance to compensate for the impact of local natural gas projects on the cost of living.

A teachers’ spokesman criticised the Papua New Guinea Teachers Association for not supporting their struggle and told the media that some of the Southern Highlands teachers had threatened to quit the organisation and form a new association.



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