

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

8 October 2011

India: Bosch workers in Bangalore on strike

Around 4,000 employees at Bosch's Aduodi auto parts plant in Bangalore downed tools on September 28 to protest the outsourcing of "non-core" manufacturing processes. The Karnataka state government has declared the strike illegal, but workers claim that the planned outsourcing violates a wage agreement that does not expire until December 2013. The MICO Employees Association vice-president has thrown an olive branch to the company, telling the media that the union had "no objection" to the company including outsourcing clauses in a new agreement. Workers do not trust the company's assurance that all affected workers will be redeployed and retrained with no loss of salary. According to Bosch, the average monthly cost of workers at the plant, including wages and entitlements, is 50,000 rupees (\$US1,098). Auto production workers in China are paid a maximum of \$365 a month with minimum entitlements.

Auto-rickshaw drivers in Mumbai demonstrate

More than 5,000 Mumbai auto rickshaw drivers struck on October 3 for a fare increase and other demands. The drivers caused a traffic jam for several hours when they drove their vehicles to the transport commissioner's office to protest. A Mumbai Auto-rickshaw Men's Union representative submitted 12 basic demands to the commissioner.

The union wants fares lifted so that drivers can earn an average 25,000 rupees (\$US450) per month, adjusted for cost of living increases every January. The drivers have given the government until November 9 to meet their demands.

Andhra Pradesh paramedics end strike

At least 4,000 striking ambulance services workers, including paramedics and ambulance drivers, in Andhra Pradesh returned to work on October 3, ending a 22-day strike over wages and entitlements. According to the Andhra Pradesh 108 Employees Association, over 700 ambulances across the state remained off-road during the strike with 3,600 emergencies unattended each day.

The workers, who are employed by GVK-EMRI, a government-contracted emergency management group, ended their strike after management agreed to lift their salaries by 6 percent effective from this month and provide a 10 percent rise from the next financial year until GVK's five-year agreement with the state government ends. The GVK Group also agreed to provide accident insurance for all workers and to

post employees in their home towns when vacancies arise.

Meanwhile, over 3,000 GVK-EMRI employees neighbouring Karnataka are maintaining strike action begun on September 27 over similar demands. The workers' demands include regularisation of services, better wages and other employment benefits, such as Pension Fund, and postings closer to home. The Karnataka State Arogya Kavacha 108 Employees' Union also wants paramedics paid more than ambulance drivers. The workers have rejected a 10 percent pay increase offer from management.

Goa horticulture workers protest

Over 100 daily wage employees at the Goa state horticulture corporation boycotted work and protested outside the corporation's Panaji office on October 3 to demand regularisation of their jobs. Workers, supervisors, clerks and produce distributors said that only some of their contracts were renewed in 2007 and there were discrepancies in their existing employment records. The protesting workers ended the walkout after corporation officials told them to submit their demands in writing by October 4.

Qantas ground staff stoppage called off

The Transport Workers Union, representing 3,800 Qantas baggage handlers, catering workers and ground crew, has called off a national one-hour stoppage planned for yesterday. TWU officials told the media that the union and Qantas were due to restart negotiations for a new work agreement next week and that the union "hopes the airline will come back to the negotiating table with a genuine offer."

TWU members stopped work for one hour across the country on September 30 and were locked out by Qantas for four hours on September 20, prior to implementing a one-hour stoppage. The union wants 5 percent annual pay rises for three years, job security clauses to prevent outsourcing, and a limit on contract labour.

The airline is involved in a similar bargaining dispute with the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers Association (ALAEA) and the Australian and International Pilots Association (AIPA). ALAEA members at Brisbane and Melbourne airports plan to walk off the job for four hours on Monday. The engineers want a pay rise and job security clauses. The AIPA has limited pilots' actions to in-flight announcements and non-compliance with the uniform code. Qantas is opposed to job security clauses, claiming that they would block work flexibility and restrict productivity improvements.

Meanwhile on Thursday, Qantas announced that it had reached a new

enterprise bargaining agreement with the Flight Attendants Association of Australia representing its short-haul cabin crew. The three-year agreement includes a 3 percent pay increase each year as well as an annual \$500 lump-sum payment. Australia's consumer price index (CPI) is 3.5 percent—meaning the pay increase in real terms is a pay cut.

Mermaid Marine workers in Western Australia impose work bans

Around 30 dock workers, employed by Mermaid Marine Australia at the Dampier Supply Base in the Pilbara, Western Australia began a campaign of limited industrial action on Friday in a three-month dispute over pay and allowances. The latest action by the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) involves an overtime ban and is aimed at minimising the impact on the company's daily operations. It follows three separate strikes by members in July. The MUA previously ordered members to end a six-day strike on August 4, claiming negotiations had made progress.

MUA members first walked off the job on July 15, after six months of negotiations for a new four-year work agreement reached deadlock. Major stumbling points were accommodation allowances and increased workforce casualisation. The union wanted the accommodation allowance lifted from \$670 per week to \$1,200, to cover high rents in Dampier, and casual numbers reduced at the Dampier base and on Mermaid's vessels.

Workers also want a \$90 per day allowance, in line with that paid to over 3,500 construction workers on the massive Gorgon LNG project off the Pilbara coast. An MUA spokesman said the overtime bans would remain while negotiations continued.

Northern Territory and Queensland excavation machinery workers strike

At least 1,900 employees at Hastings Deering depots, which sell and maintain mining excavation equipment in Queensland and the Northern Territory, walked off the job for 48 hours on Friday in a dispute over a wage increase. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members have rejected a 22 percent increase over three years. During the global financial meltdown workers accepted a union negotiated increase of just 4.5 percent over two-and-a-half years. According to the AMWU spokesman workers want an increase to compensate for the previous inferior wage deal.

Queensland health employees stop work

On Wednesday, 100 Queensland Health (QH) administration staff walked off the job for two hours and rallied in Bundaberg, in southeast Queensland, to oppose the state Labor government's 2.5 percent cap on future wage increases—1 percent below the official cost of living. A Public Sector Union spokesman said QH had demanded extensive savings that slash jobs in the region to pay for pay rates above the wage cap.

Queensland mine workers vote on strike action

After a year of failed negotiations for a new work agreement, Construction, Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members at the New Acland open cut mine, run by New Hope Coal in southeast Queensland, voted this week for industrial action. Action will include stop work meetings and overtime bans. A CFMEU official said industrial action could begin next week.

Workers have rejected a 2 percent pay increase once an agreement was reached, in addition to a 3.5 percent increase awarded in January, to be followed by a 9 percent increase over two years, from October next year. The union wants the 2 percent increase backdated to January, and the 9 percent brought forward to January next year. According to the local media, New Hope's New Acland mine announced a 17 percent profit increase last month and a 50 percent increase for executives.

Victorian food processing workers strike

At least 50 members of the National Union of Workers (NUW) employed at the Lion and Vitasoy factory in Wodonga, Victoria walked off the job for 24 hours on September 30. It followed 11 failed meetings with the company for a new work agreement. Workers have endorsed further strike action if progress in negotiations is not made.

The company has offered 4 percent annual increases for three years. Workers want a 6 percent wage rise this year and 5 percent in each of the next two years. Workers are also opposed to the removal of a clause from the old agreement ensuring that casuals receive the same pay and conditions as full-time employees.

McCain workers ordered to end strike

Three hundred striking food processing workers at the McCain plant in Ballarat, Victoria were ordered back to work on Tuesday by Fair Work Australia. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members had walked off the job during a 24-hour walkout by maintenance workers—also AMWU members—over a pay dispute. The latest action followed a lockout by McCain last month, which the union claimed was illegal.

Union representatives are expected to meet with McCain on Monday ahead of planned strikes on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Workers want a 15 percent pay rise over three years. McCain has only offered 10.5 percent.

New Zealand disability support workers to take industrial action

Service and Food Workers Union (SFWU) members will impose work bans on October 20 at PACT—a provider of support services to mental and physical disability patients in the lower part of New Zealand's South Island. SFWU and the Public Services Association (PSA) are in dispute with the company over a wage increase. PACT employees, who are paid a maximum of just \$16 (\$US12.50) an hour, want an increase that reflects the official inflation rate of 5.3 percent. PACT is offering 1 percent.

PSA members are expected to join the action. Both unions will go into mediation with the employer on October 17.

Waterfront workers hold stop-work meeting

On Tuesday, around 150 Port Otago workers held a stop-work meeting to oppose job cuts. Port Otago wants to cut 12 of 170 stevedoring jobs in response to a claimed 10 percent fall in container work since May. The waterfront workers unanimously voted to take industrial action to fight the job cuts.

The Rail and Maritime Transport Union and the Maritime Union of New Zealand condemned the company for the proposed cuts, pointing out that it recently paid a record \$12.5 million dividend to its owner, the Otago Regional Council.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact