

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

26 November 2011

Chinese shoe manufacturing workers strike

Over 7,000 employees at the Taiwan-owned Yue Cheng shoe factory in Guangdong province's Pearl River Delta walked off the job and protested outside the factory over pay cuts and the sacking of 18 managers on November 17. At least 1,000 riot police and soldiers attacked the demonstrators, attempting to disperse them. Many workers required hospital attention with one employee reporting that six riot police violently attacked a colleague with batons leaving him in a pool of blood and his clothes ripped to shreds.

The strike erupted after one of the sacked managers told workers that the company was preparing to move the factory to Jiangxi province, where wages and other costs are cheaper. Workers were also angered by the recent elimination of performance bonuses and a ban on overtime. One worker told the media, "Our basic monthly salary is only 1,100 yuan (\$US173) which, if there is no overtime or bonus, almost comes to nothing after deductions for expenses." He said they previously worked eight regular hours and two hours' overtime during the week, and eight hours of overtime on Saturdays for \$346 a month.

The strike ended after management agreed to restore overtime payments as directed by local government authorities. The factory manufactures shoes for Nike, Adidas, Reebok and New Balance. Early this month more than 2,000 workers from Stella, another Taiwanese shoemaker in Guangdong, struck over company relocation plans and compensation issues.

Garment workers in Guangdong strike

More than 400 workers stopped work at the Top Form Underwear factory in Shenzhen, Guangdong province on November 21 against unfair piece-rate wages and daily production quotas. Top Form makes garments for Vanity Fair, Warnaco, Komar Intimates and Wacoal.

According to employees, the factory does not pay overtime and even when working up to 300 hours a month in the peak season they earn less than 2,000 yuan (\$US312). Workers said they are regularly reprimanded and verbally abused by factory management.

India: Dr Reddy's pharmaceutical strike ends

A 14-week strike by 650 contract workers at the Pydibhimavaram plant of Dr. Reddy's Laboratory (DRL) in Andhra Pradesh ended last weekend after the company, in the presence of local government administrators,

agreed to meet some of the workers' demands. Employees walked out on August 13 to demand an increase in the current 5,557-rupee (\$US121) monthly wage to 12,000 rupees, improved allowances, and regularisation of employment for those who have completed five years' service.

The new agreement increases the daily wage from 213 to 260 rupees for the next two years, an offer workers previously rejected, and the company agreed to regularise 180 contract workers.

Several workers and a reporter were hospitalised on November 4 when police fired teargas shells and baton-charged the picket line after 10,000 workers from 25 factories in the industrial belt joined the picket to support the strikers.

Wintek India strike ends without resolution

Unions representing 750 striking workers at the Taiwan-based Wintek Industries mobile phone parts factory in Chennai, Tamil Nadu called off a month-long strike after the company sacked 200 contract workers and 28 rank and file strike leaders on November 18.

Workers walked out on October 24 to demand a monthly bonus and monthly wages increased to 15,000 rupees (\$US330). Contract workers are currently paid between 3,500 and 4,000 rupees a month and regular workers 5,000 to 6,000 rupees.

Wintek also has factories in Taiwan and China that, along with India, manufacture electronics for Nokia and Apple.

Communications workers in Karnataka protest

On November 21, contract workers of the state-owned telecom provider Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) protested in Shimoga over regularisation and dearness allowance payments not paid since April. Other demands were for workers in Sagar, Shikaripur and Sorab regions to be paid wages outstanding since July and proof that provident fund deductions were being made.

Karnataka public transport workers protest

Over 300 employees from four depots of the state-owned Kadamba Transport Corporation (KTC) demonstrated in the city of Panaji on Monday. Their demands included release of ex-gratia payments for 2009 and 2010, regularisation of daily wage workers, an end to outsourcing,

and honouring outstanding promotions.

Protesters later marched to the KTC Head Office to demand that the company chairman and managing director resign. Workers threatened to step up their protests if management failed to address their issues within two weeks.

Pakistan government employees protest

Pakistan government contract workers demonstrated in Peshawar on November 21 to demand permanent positions. Over 1,000 contract employees were recruited in 2008 to work in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and conduct a survey for the Benazir Income Support Programme. Protesting workers made the point that contract employees recruited at the same time in other provinces had already been regularised.

Sri Lankan education directors protest

Education directors who have acted in leading positions for more than 10 years demonstrated in front of the Education Department in Battaramulla, on the outskirts of Colombo, to demand that they be promoted into the education administrative service. The directors cannot return to their previous positions and have no choice but to be made permanent in their current postings.

Cambodian railway workers protest

On November 16, 100 former government railway workers demonstrated outside the Ministry of Transportation in Phnom Penh to demand the payment of outstanding salaries, ranging from US\$2,500 to \$5,000 per person.

Workers claimed that over 500 rail employees were dismissed in April when portions of the government rail system were privatised and that they had not received promised termination pay. It is the fourth time the workers, many of whom had worked in the rail service for over 30 years, have approached the government over the issue.

New South Wales bus union deal leaves trainee drivers with no pay

In a wage-cutting deal struck last week between the New South Wales state government and the Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU), trainee drivers' wages and conditions have been sacrificed to pay for a wage increase for existing employees.

Under the deal, new recruits will be forced to work for a fortnight without pay and then remain on the lowest pay rate—\$814 per week—for two years, previously only for one year. The unpaid fortnight will cost trainees \$1,600. Second year drivers currently earn up to \$879 a week.

The state government claimed the cost saving will help pay for a 3.25 percent pay rise for 4,000 existing drivers and hailed it as proof public sector workers could negotiate rates above the government's 2.5 percent

wage cap.

RTBU state president Gary Way said the union was pleased with the deal and claimed 75 percent of members voted to accept it. One driver, however, told the media, "The union should be protecting these guys, rather than using them to get a small increase for experienced drivers."

Sydney Ferries unions accept franchising deal

After several years of telling members they oppose privatisation, the six unions that represent Sydney Ferries employees have reached a deal with the state government that will allow private franchising of Sydney Harbour ferries. The Maritime Union of Australia convinced members at a four-hour stop work meeting on November 22 to accept the deal, even though the workers' main concern for job security was not fully resolved.

Under the new enterprise agreement, workers receive a pay rise of 3.25 percent a year for the next two years, can transfer to the new operator without loss of seniority, and all leave entitlements will be underwritten by the NSW government. The unions also accepted only two years of no forced redundancies after an employee transfers to the new operator. The new operator will determine staffing levels from the first day of the takeover.

In September, the MUA, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, the Electrical Trades Union, the Australian Maritime Officers Union, the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers, and the Australian Services Union, told union members that they would only negotiate with the government on franchising if workers remained public servants and only management was contracted out.

Victorian child protection workers lift work bans

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) agreed last weekend to a government request to suspend work bans for a week while negotiations over staffing levels resume. Department of Human Services child protection workers had begun capping caseloads. Employees with more than one-year's experience limited the number of child abuse cases they would handle to 12 while those with less experience would take on six cases.

With chronic understaffing, the average number of cases for child protection workers has been about 15. Understaffed regional offices have reported caseloads of 30 or more over the past two years.

CPSU spokesman Julian Kennelly described the lifting of the bans as a "pause" in the campaign. Community Services Minister Mary Wooldridge has threatened to use Fair Work Australia to force an end to industrial action if the caseload bans were re-imposed.

Spotless cleaners in Victoria vote for strike action

More than 90 percent of cleaners working for contractor Spotless at 11 shopping centres across Victoria have voted to take protected strike action for improved wages and reduced workloads. According to the United Voice (UV) union, Spotless continually increases the workload by cutting the time allocated for each cleaning job and only pays the minimum wage of \$15.51 per hour or \$589.30 for a 38-hour week. VU has demanded a 33

percent pay increase for all cleaners.

Spotless has assured the shopping centres that all shifts will be fully manned during any strike, indicating that it intends to employ scabs.

Airline catering workers in Darwin locked out

Gate Gourmet catering workers at Darwin airport were locked out for 24 hours on November 23, after walking off the job in an 18-month long dispute for a wage increase. The Transport Workers Union members, who service Qantas flights, decided to strike after the latest company offer was below the inflation rate. Further strike action has been planned.

Tasmania's air ambulance paramedics take action

In a long-running pay dispute with Ambulance Tasmania, six of the ten paramedics trained for air ambulance evacuations are refusing to do air ambulance duties and will continue with on-ground paramedic duties until the dispute is resolved.

A spokesman for the Health and Community Services Union said that the paramedics wanted the \$3.20 per hour penalty rate paid for helicopter shifts increased as recognition of the extra training and work involved. Ambulance Australia has refused to negotiate, claiming the union had agreed to the current rate in an enterprise agreement signed last year.



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