

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

3 December 2011

More strikes in China

Over 100 employees at a Tesco retail store in the city of Jinhua, Zhejiang province blocked all entrances to the building and occupied it in protest over wages and redundancy payments on Tuesday. Employees became suspicious that the store was about to close without notice after management began discounting stock. Tesco later confirmed that some of its older shops in China would close.

Fearing the store would close overnight, leaving them without wages due and entitlements—a common practice in China—the workers have demanded immediate payment of wages due and termination entitlements of one month's pay for each year of service, which is law.

India: Protesting cement workers attacked by police in Rajasthan

Nine workers were detained and several injured when police used tear gas and batons against striking workers at the state-owned Wonder Cement factory in Chittorgarh on November 26. The strike was sparked after factory management only paid 100,000 rupees (\$US2,200) compensation to the family of Babulal Gujjar, who was killed in an accident while on the job.

The striking workers want compensation increased to 2 million rupees and a government job offered to a family member. The factory employs around 500 workers.

Visually impaired workers in Delhi on strike

Visually impaired employees at a disposable plate-making unit in Mundka, Delhi, run by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) walked out on November 25 and rallied at the NGO's office in Pushpa Vihar to oppose a change in wage structure—from fixed pay to productivity-linked—which the

workers claim will depress their actual wages. The visually impaired employees decided to hold an indefinite protest at Delhi's Jantar Mantar historical site from November 28 after NFB officials refused to negotiate.

Government nurses in Pakistan end strike

Striking nurses at government hospitals in Punjab returned to work on Sunday ending a three-day strike after the government signed an agreement to resolve outstanding issues.

The nurses walked out on November 26 after a month of protests and failed negotiations for a wage increase, improved staffing levels and other issues. Members of the Young Nurses Association threatened to remain on strike until the government signed a deal. One nurse was injured when police attacked a protest in Lahore.

The Punjab government has agreed to establish a committee of nurses and government representatives to review wages and have a proposal ready in 30 days. It has also agreed to act on outstanding promotions and formalise wages for workers regularised last year.

Cambodian garment workers on strike

At least 1,000 employees at the Cambo Handsome 1 garment factory in Phnom Penh walked off the job on Monday to protest the suspension of three union leaders of the Labour Friendship Union. Workers rallied at the Prey Sar market for about an hour demanding the suspensions be lifted.

The strike followed a demonstration by nearly 2,000 Cambo Handsome employees on Saturday at the Dangkor district hall after they heard one of the suspended workers was charged with theft of two tee-shirts.

Police released the suspended worker, Van Rin, after the protest. He told the media that he had been singled out because he was promoting workers' rights. "Even when I went to the

toilet, they followed me and took pictures, they warned workers not to talk to me and said they would not get a raise," he said.

Cambo Handsome workers have said that they will remain on strike until all three workers are reinstated and the theft charge is dropped. They have also demanded that the company provide a transport allowance and change security guards at the factory.

Cambo Handsome is South Korean owned and has five factories in Cambodia with over 7,000 employees producing garments for the Gap, JC Penny and Old Navy brands.

Sacked resort workers in Cambodia demonstrate

Former employees of Angkor Village Hotel and Resort in Siem Reap, northwestern Cambodia, are maintaining their four-month picket at the resort to demand reinstatement. Angkor management this week ignored a second court order directing the reinstatement of 67 workers terminated during July and August on trumped-up offences including allegations that they tried to poison management after staff began unionising.

An official of the Cambodian Tourism and Service Workers Federation said that the sacked workers had been unable to secure other employment and were becoming desperate. Former employee, Chhey Phy, alleged that Angkor management had emailed photos of the workers to managers of other hotels in the town and urged them not to hire them.

Western Australian port workers strike

At least 18 of the 23 traffic controllers and pilot boat crew at the Port of Fremantle in Perth walked off the job for 48 hours on Thursday over a pay dispute. Maritime Union of Australian (MUA) members have rejected the port authority's offer of 4.75 percent annual pay increases over three years. An MUA negotiator claimed workers were more concerned with their rosters and were willing to defer the wage issue if an agreement could be made over their shifts. Workers oppose the current 12-hour shift arrangements in which they typically work six days on and two days off. The MUA wants 6 percent annual pay increases.

The Western Australian state Liberal government appealed to the Gillard federal government to use Fair Work Australia (FWA) to terminate the strike on the grounds it is damaging to the state economy.

Victorian health workers' union accepts government's

wage deal

Officials of the Health Services Union (HSU) on Thursday persuaded 500 delegates, representing over 40,000 allied health workers in Victoria, to accept the state government's proposed \$35 weekly pay rise.

While full details of the settlement have not been released to the media, HSU president Kathy Jackson admitted that the settlement was not "ideal." The HSU originally demanded 8 percent annual increases over three years with no trade-offs. The government offered 2.5 percent increases with additional increases for productivity trade-offs.

Striking New Zealand port workers face lockouts

Ports of Auckland Limited (POAL) has threatened to lock out over 320 workers at its Fergusson and Bledisloe terminals following a 48-hour strike that began on December 1. POAL also plans another 48-hour lockout following a two-day port workers' strike on December 7. These are the first lockouts at a New Zealand port since 1951.

Maritime Union of New Zealand (MUNZ) members voted for strike action after negotiations for a new collective agreement ended in deadlock in November. The union rejected POAL's most recent offer to roll over the expired collective agreement with no changes to terms and conditions. The deal included a \$200 payment for back pay and a 2.5 percent increase in hourly rates. New Zealand's official cost of living increase for the year to November, however, was 4.6 percent.

Port workers are concerned about the ongoing contracting out of port shuttle work to Conlinxx, a 90-percent owned POAL subsidiary that employs non-union labor. POAL is also attempting to bypass the union by offering workers individual employment agreements at a higher hourly rate than that offered in the collective agreement.



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