Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

29 December 2012

Police attack protesting Bangladeshi garment workers

At least 50 people were injured, and some were hospitalised, when police used tear gas and rubber bullets against several hundred garment workers protesting on the Dhaka-Aricha highway in Savar on December 24.

Locked out workers at the DNC garment factory at Razphulbaria, in the Ashulia industrial area on the outskirts of Dhaka, had been demonstrating outside the factory to demand their November and December salary arrears and the reopening of the factory.

Management suddenly closed the factory on December 15, without giving any reason and without notifying workers. The management, communicating via the police, promised workers their demands would be met on January 10.

Cambodian garment workers beaten unconscious

In two disputes, police and factory security guards left at least two striking workers unconscious and others seriously injured when they beat the workers with electric batons and threw rocks at them during protests in front of their factories on December 25.

At the Master and Frank factory in Ang Snuol district, on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, 50 police hit protesters with electric batons in an attempt to end a protest by 300 workers, knocking out a man and a pregnant woman in the process. Workers' demands included reinstatement of 11 union members fired over the past four months, and payment of overdue lunch wages.

At the Conpress Holdings factory, in Phnom Penh's Meanchey district, two female workers were seriously injured when factory security guards hit them with rocks and used fire hoses against more than 200 protesters who were burning tyres in front of the factory. Strikers demanded reinstatement of six union members sacked in the past two months, an end to discrimination against union members and a ban on forcing employees to work overtime.

Meanwhile, 2,000 employees at the bankrupt US-owned factory Svay Rieng Garment Company have been on strike since December 24, with a list of five demands. The factory makes hospital gowns. Details of their demands have not been reported to media.

Indian auto-rickshaw drivers fight ban

Auto-rickshaw drivers in Kurnool city, in India's south-eastern coastal state of Andhra Pradesh stopped work and demonstrated in front of the Road Transport Authority office on December 20 to protest against the authority's decision to disallow their seven-seater auto rickshaws within the city limit.

Drivers said the ban would impoverish close to 1,500 families. The Stalinist party-affiliated unions, the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU), All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and Indian Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), participated in the protest.

Andhra Pradesh teachers defend new colleagues

On December 24, teachers protested in front of the Collectorate office in Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh, to demand full salary payments for more than 260 apprentice teachers. An Andhra Pradesh United Teachers Federation official said the teachers had been issued appointment letters last year but were still not being paid as qualified teachers.

Karnataka refinery workers fight sackings

Eighty former employees of Kaleesuwari Refinery Private Limited, which produces edible oil, have been protesting at the factory gates in Tumkur, Karnataka since their termination on

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August 27. Workers told the media they had been refused entry into the factory since they formed a union and put forward demands. The Tamil Nadu-based factory employs 500 people, with only 25 regular workers. The rest are on contract.

Pakistan: Punjab textile workers protest

Hundreds of textile workers began demonstrations in Lahore on December 24 after being left without work for over two weeks since the Power and Water ministry cut gas and electricity supplies to all textile factories in Southern Punjab. The government admitted that it cut supply to selected industries to avoid cuts to domestic customers during winter, fearing wider protests.

The All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) claimed the energy cuts would affect around 10 million workers if extended beyond December. Most workers employed by the textile industry live in colonies built inside mill compounds, with electricity and water distributed from the factories' supplies. An APTMA spokesman said most of the colonies had been without electricity or water since the power was cut.

Karachi municipal workers demand pay

On December 24, hundreds of Karachi Municipal Council sanitary workers came from surrounding towns and villages to join city colleagues in a protest at the Karachi Press Club to demand salary payments before the Christmas religious festivities. The protest was organised by the Municipal Workers Union Alliance and the United Workers Union.

Singapore construction workers strike

Sime Chong Construction's foreign workers refused to begin work at a building site in Singapore on December 18 to protest non-payment of salaries for November. A company spokesman told city officials, who had intervened, that the salaries would be paid within 24 hours.

In the past, strikes have been rare in Singapore, but this stoppage, involving 28 workers, is the latest among a growing number. In February, 200 construction workers refused to work and rallied near their living quarters in Tampines in a dispute over unpaid wages. The mostly Bangladeshi labourers, who earned just $US14.4 a day, had not been paid for three months by their employers, Sunway Concrete Products and Techcom Construction & Trading.

Earlier this month, 171 Chinese nationals working as bus drivers for SMRT, Singapore's second largest public transport operator, went on strike to fight for higher wages and better living conditions. Singapore's construction and services sectors are highly dependent on the city's low-paid 1.5 million foreign workers—around one-third of Singapore's workforce.

Queensland milk processing workers strike

Up to 80 workers at the Dairy Farmers milk processing factory in Creastmead, South Brisbane, walked off the job for 24 hours on December 24. They formed a picket at the factory gate after negotiations for a new work agreement with parent company Lion Group broke down. The company called in police, who outnumbered the picketers, to maintain truck movements to and from the factory. One worker was arrested.

The National Union of Workers has submitted a claim for a 4 percent pay rise, improved job security and more public holidays—the workers currently have only three a year—to bring conditions into line with interstate workers doing the same work.

Papua New Guinea teachers protest for leave fares

Almost 300 public school teachers in West New Britain (WNB) province, off Papua New Guinea's north coast, marched to the provincial government headquarters on December 21 to demand their leave fare entitlements. They demanded payment of their outstanding payments for 2011, along with entitlements for 2012.

The march followed similar protests by teachers in the Western Highlands and East Sepik provinces. Due to low wages, most teachers cannot return to their home provinces for the festive holidays if their fare entitlements are not paid. Delayed payments have been a problem for nearly a decade, but the PNG Teachers Association, with over 30,000 members, has failed to organise teachers in a national campaign.

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