

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

26 January 2013

Strikes over pay and conditions continue in China

More than 1,000 workers at Shanghai Shinmei Electric downed tools on January 18 and occupied its Shanghai factory, refusing to allow 18 Japanese and Chinese managers to leave. After 48 hours, over 400 riot police stormed the factory and released the managers, seriously injuring several workers.

The workers' action followed the introduction of heavy fines, demerits or immediate termination for workers who made production mistakes. The new disciplinary policy was introduced after the Japanese-owned appliance maker plant was recently acquired by a Chinese company.

Striking workers told media that the 49 new disciplinary clauses discriminated against certain workers. Many were also concerned they would lose benefits accumulated during previous years at the plant.

Management has withdrawn the new policy and met with 100 workers' representatives on January 22. Strikers were offered 100 yuan each if they reported for work the following day.

Sanitation workers in Guangdong province strike

More than 200 sanitation workers from three companies in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, walked off the job on January 10 to demand a pay rise. Most sanitation workers earn less than the city's minimum wage of 1,300 yuan (\$US206) a month. Workers also asked for outstanding pay for overtime worked during the Guangzhou Asian Games more than two years ago. The district government has promised to raise wages by 10 percent in May to reach 1,430 yuan a month.

Meanwhile, in Tianhe district, sanitation workers said their 1,600-yuan salary was too low, their bonus was cut and the year-end double salary had been canceled. In January last year, more than 50 sanitation workers went on strike for higher wages in Zengcheng, a county-level city in the suburbs of Guangzhou. The monthly salary of Zengcheng sanitation workers was only 1,060 yuan.

Thailand airline workers strike

On January 19, about 400 Thai Airways International (THAI) ground staff at Suvarnabhumi airport walked off the job to demand increased pay and bonuses. The strike delayed dozens of flights and affected hundreds of passengers.

Workers demanded a two-month bonus and increased performance bonuses—from 200 million baht to 500 million baht. The ground staff

employees want the performance bonuses shared equally among the airline's 26,000 employees. The union also wants a 7.5 percent pay rise for operational staff from Level 1 to Level 7. Current monthly salaries do not exceed 30,000 baht (\$US970).

THAI management has offered a 4 percent salary increase and a one-month bonus. Management threatened that if the ground staff went on strike again it would resort to outsourcing. This month the company posted a 7 billion baht end of year profit.

Thailand bank employees protest

Around 100 Bangkok Bank employees protested outside the company's headquarters in Bangkok on January 22 to demand a salary increase and full restoration of bonus cuts. The Bangkok Bank Workers Union called on management to resume payment of an annual four-month bonus instead of the current two-month bonus and payment of a 450,000-baht lump sum to retiring employees which had been reduced to 300,000 baht.

The union wants a 6 percent pay rise for all employees. Management said it would pay a 3 percent raise for permanent staff and 6 percent for those in marketing. The union also wants a flat rate 7 percent contribution to the provident fund for all staff, instead of varied increases. The union was due to commence talks with the Labour Ministry on January 24.

India: Jharkhand waste management workers strike

Over 1,200 workers of the privately owned A2Z waste management company in Jharkhand's capital city Ranchi walked off the job for one day on January 22 to demand payment of two months' outstanding wages. Management responded to strike action in December by assuring workers that the dues would be paid by January 20. The Indian Trade Union-Jharkhand chapter also wants double pay on public holidays and every employee to receive 7 days' casual leave and 18 days' paid leave a year.

Andhra Pradesh pharmaceutical manufacturing workers protest

Around 1,000 Aurobindho Pharma Company workers demonstrated in front of the company's Srikakulam plant on January 21 over several demands. These included implementation of wage agreements pending for the last nine months, an end to recruitment through outsourcing agencies, the regularisation of existing workers and implementation of labour laws

for canteen and power plant workers.

The protest was organised by the Stalinist Communist Party of India-(Marxist) affiliated to the Centre For Indian Trade Unions (CITU). Protest leaders met with management and threatened to call strike action if their demands were not met.

Karnataka farm workers protest

Karnataka State Agricultural Workers' Union members protested outside the taluk (divisional) office in Udupi on January 21 to demand that the state government allocate 10 percent of total funds in the next budget for the welfare of farm workers. Protesters handed a memorandum to the chief minister demanding employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), ration cards, medical facilities, proper education for their children and decent housing.

Karnataka has close to 10 million agricultural workers, a number which is growing rapidly as farmers lose their land and seek work. Protesting agricultural workers said that MNREGA had not provided employment for many of the dislocated farmers and that those already employed were not being paid on time.

Karnataka cinema workers protest

On January 20, members of the cinema wing of the Dharwad, Haveri and Gadag Employees' Union marched from their union office in Hubli to Broadway and the Sripadma theatre where they called on the chief minister to implement their demands.

The workers are demanding the minimum salary be increased to 12,000 rupees a month (\$US200) and monthly wages for those who had served for 10, 20 and 30 years to be fixed at 15,000, 20,000 and 25,000 rupees respectively. They also want proper payments to the Provident Fund and overtime, and compensation for workers at recently closed theatres.

Tamil Nadu sanitary workers protest

Sanitary workers and overhead tank operators protested at the Collectorate (state government) office in Pudukottai on January 21 to demand immediate disbursement of arrears as per the sixth pay commission recommendations due from October 2010, immediate payment of Dearness Allowance pending from 1992 and fixed salary for overhead tank operators.

The Stalinist CITU, which covers the sanitation workers, submitted a memorandum of their demands to the Collector.

Sri Lankan railway unions call off strike

The Joint Trade Union Alliance (JTUA), representing over 100 Sri Lanka rail unions, has called off a 56-hour national strike planned for January 22 after the government called for a meeting with the JTUA for January 23.

The planned walkout was to demand a pay increase and followed a 48-hour national strike on January 9 and a 24-hour strike last December. The unions called an abrupt end to a national stoppage in February last year after the government falsely promised to resolve the workers' grievance.

According to the JTUA, rail employees have not received a "proper" wage increase since 2006. The unions also want 9,000 vacant positions filled.

Sydney pie factory workers strike again

For the second time in two months, 100 members of the National Union of Workers (NUW) at Sargent's Pies Colyton factory in Sydney walked off the job for 48 hours on January 22 in a dispute over wages.

The workers, who earn just \$16 an hour—Australia's minimum wage is \$15.96 an hour—want a 6 percent pay increase, or 99 cents an hour. The company has said that it would not pay more than 3 percent. Workers with 17 years' experience still receive the minimum wage.

Negotiations between the union and Sargent's Pies for a new enterprise agreement are ongoing.

New Zealand coal mine workers bow to union pressure

In a long-running dispute over a pay cut, workers at the state-owned Solid Energy's Stockton mine, on the west coast of New Zealand's South Island, have caved in to union pressure and voted in favour of a proposal to cut shifts from 12 hours to 10 hours. On January 17, Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU) members voted 118-91 in favour of the company's plans, having rejected the same proposal twice in recent months.

The cuts, allegedly a temporary measure, will result in a 17 percent reduction in pay. An EPMU spokesman revealed in an interview with Radio New Zealand that the union fully backed the company. The miners "didn't really have a choice ... There was no other way around it that we could see or the company could see," he said.

In October, Solid Energy axed about 450 jobs blaming the collapse of global coal prices. In reality, Solid Energy is one of several state assets that the government is making more profitable in the lead-up to privatisation.

Solomon Island teachers and students locked out

The Solomon Island's ministry of education has extended the annual school holidays by one week from January 21, effectively locking out teachers and students. The Lillo government's action followed threatened industrial action by the Solomon Islands National Teachers Association (SINTA) which had set a deadline of January 18 to pay its members a promised increase in pay.

According to SINTA, last February the government, after three years of negotiations, agreed to increase teachers' salaries and allowances. The commitment was never honoured. The union put off strike action last year, after the government again promised that the payments would be made by December.

While the government claimed it had always accepted teachers' claims it has never budgeted for the \$34 million needed for the pay increases. SINTA told the media that their strike threat still stands and that the government must pay teachers their dues in full.



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