

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

2 February 2013

China: Teachers strike over wages

Attempts by local governments across China to impose the 2009 central government wage reforms on high school teachers have resulted in a series of strikes and protests in the past two months. Since last December, school teachers in Wuhan, Hubei, Guizhou, Zhejiang and Henan have protested against the cancellation of bonuses or demanded pay increases. According to the *China Labor Bulletin*, at least ten strikes and protests were recorded in January.

On December 26, 200 teachers at the Hefeng School in Zhuhai walked out after management announced that 30 percent of the teachers' salaries would be deducted and only paid on the basis of their performance. Teachers told the media that, after payment of social insurance and housing provident funds, their take home salary was only 3,800 yuan (\$US603) per month. If another 30 percent were cut it would create serious financial problems, they said. Teachers pointed out that the schools were "using our money to reward ourselves."

Local governments allege that they do not have sufficient funds to pay additional performance-related bonuses to teachers at primary and middle schools. As a result, a proportion of the teachers' salaries was deducted and reclassified as a bonus. This led to protests in Henan, Hunan, Jiangsu, and Guangdong.

Pakistan: Punjab government doctors' strike continues

Young Doctors Association (YDA) members at Punjab government hospitals are maintaining a boycott of outpatient departments to demand that the state government stop victimising young doctors. Hundreds protested on January 10 against the termination of six doctors, the suspension and withholding of salaries of another 12, and the transfer, without valid reason, of over 60 doctors.

The doctors walked out on January 16, following the arrest of several colleagues when they entered a medical superintendent's office in Gujranwala to renew their contracts. The YDA has demanded the release of the arrested doctors and resolution of long standing demands.

Despite repeated promises over the past year, the government has failed to implement a new service structure, increasing the wages and benefits of government doctors. A three-week strike at public hospitals last July was called off by the YDA, following a return-to-work order by the courts. That was preceded by an 8-day strike in

April to protest the transfer of 700 doctors with no valid reason, which the YDA claimed was part of a plan by health authorities to weaken the association after a series of walkouts that commenced in 2011 over service structure and other grievances.

Pakistan: Government clerks in Punjab walk out

Clerks and Punjab government Grade 1 to 15 employees walked out on January 29 and protested outside the irrigation department in Lahore to demand the federal and state governments revise pay scales, implement timely promotions and regularise daily wages clerks. Protest action last year by Punjab members of the All Pakistan Clerks Association (APCA) was called off by the union after the government falsely promised to implement workers' demands.

The white-collar workers are also demanding increases in housing allowances and implementation of government commission recommendations. Pay scales are still calculated on 2007 rates. Clerks have threatened more protests and strike action if their demands are not met.

India: Samkr Piston and Rings workers maintain protests

Samkr Piston and Rings workers in Srikakulam, northern Andhra Pradesh, demonstrated outside the office of India's Minister for Communications and Technology on January 25 to demand the government present their grievances to the company. Workers alleged that Samkr had not honoured previous agreements and failed to pay their salaries for the last four months.

The protest was led by the Stalinist Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), which has dragged out the dispute by diverting workers into making ineffective harmless appeals to the district administration. The CITU has threatened to intensify protests if the Labour Department failed to convince company management to settle workers' demands.

Samkr Piston and Rings has three plants in Andhra Pradesh which produce auto parts for export to vehicle manufacturers in the US, Europe and the UK. The demonstration follows three months of protests last year and the arrest of 200 piston workers in December.

Andhra Pradesh contract medical workers protest

Contract medical workers, represented by the AITUC-affiliated Andhra Pradesh Medical Contract Workers Union protested in front of the District Coordinator of Hospital Services (DCHS) office in Kadapa on January 28 with several demands. These include a wage rise, payment of arrears and disbursement of salaries on the first of every month. Workers also want six months' paid maternity leave for female employees, national holidays and a holiday every second Saturday on par with permanent workers.

The union officials submitted a memorandum of claims to a DCHS official and stated that workers would begin a relay hunger strike from February 18 if their demands were not met.

Karnataka childcare centre workers continue protests

Following a series of protests and limited strike action in 2012, members of the Karnataka State Anganwadi (childcare) Workers and Assistants Association affiliated with the Stalinist AITUC, demonstrated in Bangalore on January 29 over several long-standing demands.

Protesters included workers from Mysore, Chamrajnagar and Mandya who are demanding regularisation of their services as group C and D employees with a minimum monthly 10,000-rupee (\$US185.6) salary, compulsory employee state health insurance, and a provident fund.

They also want the government to withdraw plans to privatise child health care clinics and anganwadi services. Over 2,000 anganwadi workers in Bangalore district struck over this issue on November 19.

Chandigarh public school teachers protest

On January 22, more than 500 members of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) Teachers' Welfare Association rallied in Chandigarh, the capital of Haryana and Punjab states, to demand regularisation of services. They presented a petition to the minister of education requesting he approach the ministry of human resource development with their demand. According to the association, the regularisation of SSA teachers was approved by the central government in August, 2011.

SSA, or "Education for All Movement", is a central government program initiated in partnership with the states to provide universal education for 6-14 year-old children. Over 100 million additional children were to be educated under the initiative. Under the program extra trainee teachers were hired on a non-permanent basis.

New South Wales coal carrier workers vote to strike

Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members at Pacific National (PN) Coal in New South Wales have voted for 12-, 24- and 48-hour strike action. The decision by 850 train drivers and ancillary employees is part of a year-long dispute with the company over an

enterprise agreement.

PN Coal walked away from negotiations in early January after 85 percent of workers rejected its latest offer of 4 percent annual pay increases over four years with roster changes. The union has demanded a 9 percent pay rise in the first year of the new agreement followed by two successive rises of 7 percent in the next two years of the agreement.

PN has threatened to reduce its 3 percent annual pay rise offer if workers take industrial action but said it would pay the increase to any employee who refused to strike. The company has also said it would cut pay increases to 2.5 percent if a resolution is not found by the end of February.

Pacific National, which carries two-thirds of NSW's coal, is owned by the Asciano ports and rail group. Mining giant Xstrata Coal has threatened legal action against the union if coal supplies to the ports are disrupted by industrial action. Under the Gillard government's draconian Fair Work Act a third party whose business is "severely" affected by industrial action can apply to the FWA tribunal to have industrial action stopped and force the dispute into arbitration.

Solomon Islands teachers maintain strike

Following a one-week lockout last week, close to 9,000 members of the Solomon Islands Teachers Association (SINTA) have decided to ignore a return-to-work directive from the Trades Dispute Panel (TDP) and vowed to remain out until the government takes concrete steps to implement its long-promised pay increase. SINTA has begun legal proceedings to challenge the TDP directive.

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.

One teacher told media that the Solomon Islands education pay system was drastically in need of review. He pointed out that while some teachers only receive \$200 (\$US27) a week, other less experienced teachers get just \$200 a month.



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