

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

1 June 2013

## Chinese police force strikers back to work

On May 23, hundreds of riot police in full military gear used dogs, teargas and beatings to force 1,000 striking employees of Ruide Electronics back into their factory in Xile village, Shenzhen municipality. The company's entire workforce went on strike to protest the company's plan to relocate without giving employees proper compensation.

Ruide Electronics is a subsidiary of ZTE Corporation and primarily manufactures cell-phone chargers and batteries.

## Cambodian garment workers attacked by riot police

At least 23 workers were seriously injured and one pregnant worker miscarried when military police using electric batons attempted to break up a protest by 3,000 striking Sabrina (Cambodia) garment workers in Kampong Speu province, west of the capital, Phnom Penh on May 27. Sabrina (Cambodia), which employs 5,000 people, manufactures for US sportswear company Nike. Employees walked out on May 21 to demand an increase in their meager \$75 monthly salary and \$US14 per month to help pay for transport, rent and healthcare costs.

## India: Finance workers on strike in Kerala

Employees at 23 branches of the small-loans firm Manappuram Finance have been on strike since April 10 against arbitrary transfers and other "repressive" management measures. Kasaragod branch's employees demonstrated outside their office on May 25 while strikers at the Kahangad office initiated a fast-unto-death protest on May 13.

Manappuram Finance has 3,200 branches across 26 states of India. It provides loans accepting gold jewellery as collateral. Workers told media that dozens of employees were transferred to other branches after they formed a union.

## Rural Development contract workers on hunger strike

Rural Development contract workers of Ongole in Andhra Pradesh began a relay hunger strike on May 22 to demand job permanency for over 6,600 contract workers. Other claims include a pay rise in line with the increasing cost of living and social benefits on par with regular workers.

## Haryana auto workers protest

Auto workers from seven unions demonstrated on Monday outside the Mini Secretariat in Gurgaon, Haryana to protest a May 19 riot-police attack on 200 protesting sacked employees of Maruti Suzuki in Kaithal. At least 96 Maruti Suzuki workers were arrested.

Unions involved in the May 27 protest were from Maruti Suzuki, Honda, Suzuki Powertrain, RICO, Suzuki Motorcycle, Hero MotoCorp, Sona Koyo Steering and Satyam Auto. Demonstrators shouted anti-government slogans and accused the government of supporting the company. The protesters submitted a memorandum to the Haryana chief minister demanding action against officials responsible for atrocities against the sacked Maruti workers. The memorandum called for reinstatement of the sacked auto workers and immediate release of those arrested.

## Jammu and Kashmir police attack protesting health workers

Police used water cannon and batons in an attempt to end a demonstration by hundreds of Public Health Engineering workers near the Civil Secretariat in Srinagar in the northern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir on May 27. Demands included regulation of wages of daily and casual workers, salaries due and regularised salary payments. Their action

followed several months of strikes and demonstrations. Protesters threatened to begin an indefinite hunger strike on June 5 if the authorities failed to address their demands.

### **Bangladesh: Ashulia garment workers continue protests**

Some 20,000 garment workers rallied in the Ashulia industrial area on the outskirts of Dhaka and blocked the main highway to Dhaka on May 27 to demand better pay. Over 50 workers were injured when police used rubber bullets and baton-charged their protest. Workers retaliated by throwing stones at police and their vehicles.

Tensions between garment workers and employers have been high since the death of 1,000 garment workers at the Rana Plaza building in Dhaka on April 24. Ongoing protests since the Rana Plaza catastrophe have reduced garment production in Ashulia to 80 percent capacity. These plants account for 30 percent of Bangladesh's total garment exports.

### **Western Australia: Airport security screeners walk out**

On May 28, 80 MSS airport security screening workers at Qantas and Jetstar terminals at the Perth Domestic Airport in Western Australia walked out for 24 hours in a dispute over a new work agreement. Their action was sparked after five employees were locked out after attending a one-hour stop-work meeting to discuss the progress of six months of ongoing negotiations between the United Voice (UV) union and MSS.

MSS security workers want pay and penalty rate parity with their eastern states colleagues. MSS workers in Perth earn 8.7 percent less annually than their counterparts in Adelaide and Melbourne where living costs are significantly lower. A UV official said five employees were handed notices stating that they would not be allowed to resume work until June 12. UV has not announced if further action is planned.

### **Sydney ferry workers strike**

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members at state-owned Harbour City Ferries in Sydney walked out for nearly four hours on May 27 to protest proposed new rosters. The MUA complained that the Liberal state government had ignored the union's requests for consultations before a recent media announcement on "modernising" Sydney Ferries. According to

the union, the promise to deliver new vessels, more wharves and a better timetable would adversely affect rosters.

Fair Work Australia, the Gillard government's industrial relations tribunal, ruled in favour of a government injunction application on Monday and banned ferry workers from taking any further action until July 27.

### **Tasmanian building workers protest**

Former employees of JHC Constructions rallied outside the collapsed building company's office in Hobart, Tasmania's capital, on May 28 to demand entitlements and unpaid wages. According to the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), the company director had gone into hiding and a partner had opened a new building company.

### **New Caledonia general strike ends**

Tens of thousands of workers throughout New Caledonia ended a 12-day strike over the high cost of living on May 26 after the government agreed to meet some of their demands, including a price freeze. The strike grounded most domestic and international flights and closed the port in Noumea. Road blocks also prevented cargo transport across the territory.

A protocol was reached after two days of negotiations between most unions, the territorial government, the French High Commissioner and business groups. On top of the price freeze, the protocol will see a 10 percent price reduction by the end of this week on 300 food and hygiene products and 200 other items that make up 80 percent of the needs of the average consumer. The deal lowers phone and internet costs as well as bank fees. Transport costs for those living in remote areas will also be subsidised.

The high cost of living in New Caledonia is a long-standing issue and triggered a three-day general strike of 25,000 workers in May 2011. Prices for general goods are 30–60 percent higher than in France.



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