Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

18 January 2014

Cambodian garment workers back on strike

A week after 300,000 Cambodian garment workers were forced to end a 15-day strike, about 12,500 workers at factories—two in Phnom Penh, one in Kandal and another in Kompong Cham—struck on January 14 after being told that they would not be paid during the previous walkout. Workers are entering their respective factories but sitting at their stations and refusing to work.

On December 24, workers walked out of over 400 factories to protest against the government's decision to raise the minimum monthly wage from the current $80 to just $95 for full-time workers and $90 for temporary workers. Workers and unions had demanded $160. The government offered an additional $5, but six unions representing the workers rejected the offer and refused to call an end to the walkout.

Union officials sent strikers back to work after a violent military police crackdown by Prime Minister Hun Sen's government that left four workers confirmed dead, more than 20 seriously injured, and at least 23 detained, facing serious criminal charges.

Garment manufacture is Cambodia's biggest export earner, supplying apparel to retailers mainly in the US and the European Union. The industry earned nearly $US5.1 billion in the first 11 months of 2013. Cambodia has about 800 garment and footwear factories, employing about 600,000 workers, mostly women.

Chinese brush-making workers on strike

At least 400 of 600 employees at the Korean-owned Doo Jung cosmetic brush factory in Shenzhen city, in Southern China's Guangdong province, have been on strike since January 11 over "serious labor violations." The strike was triggered after management fired 30 student employees who walked out over the physical assault of a female team leader by a Korean manager. Workers decided to maintain their strike on January 13 after one of their colleagues was hospitalised when police attacked strikers using electric batons.

A small number of workers on January 13 accepted an offer from Doo Jung management to pay each worker $US331 in compensation and repay two years of social insurance, despite the factory not paying workers' social insurance for much longer.

Doo Jung employees told *China Labor Watch* that they are obliged to work 3–5 hours overtime each day, in addition to their normal eight-hour schedule, and usually six days a week, sometimes seven. They claimed that the factory has not purchased social insurance for workers, as required by law, and never conducts pre-work occupational safety training or takes effective safety protection measures.

India: Gurgaon auto workers strike

Workers struck at the Manesar-based firm Munjal Kiriu, the biggest supplier of auto parts to Hero Motocorps and Maruti Suzuki India in the Gurgaon industrial area, on January 14 following an assault on 65 suspended workers protesting at the factory gate by 20 company-hired thugs.

While management has agreed to take back 50 workers suspended last month for "inefficiency," strikers demanded that all 65 be reinstated. Munjal Kiriu workers have long demanded the right to form a union but management has always refused.

Chennai city sanitary workers walkout

Sanitary workers from Ramky Enviro Engineering in Chennai city, the Tamil Nadu capital struck for 48 hours on January 9 to demand a better bonus for the festival season. Nearly 360 compactus truck drivers from three city zones, the sanitary workers want a 5,000-rupee ($US81.3) festival bonus but the company has only offered 3,500 rupees. Negotiations are continuing.

Kerala houseboat workers strike

Alappuzha district houseboat workers, in the Indian west coast state of Kerala, have been on strike since January 11 after rejecting a pay deal negotiated last year between the House Boat and Resort Workers Union, affiliated with the Stalinist Centre of Indian Trade Unions, and the All Kerala Houseboat Owners Association. Talks between workers and the Alappuzha district collector failed to resolve the issue. Workers' demands include job security and their monthly wage increased from the current 8,500 rupees to 12,000 rupees ($US 195).

Houseboat workers ended a seven-day strike in September over the same claims after the tourist minister intervened and gave a false assurance that the ministry would represent their demands.

© World Socialist Web Site

Punjab government workers strike

On January 9, thousands of state government employees across India's northern state of Punjab began a planned three-day strike on a raft of long standing demands. These include upgrade of positions, dearness allowances (DA), staffing increases to cater to rising workload, a pension scheme, regularisation of daily wage workers, allotment of plots to employees and promotion of qualified employees to supervisory positions. Workers in Mohali ended their strike in the evening after a representative from the deputy commissioner's office accepted a memorandum from the workers.

Pakistan: Lahore young doctors resume protests

Members of the Young Doctors' Association (YDA)-Punjab chapter demonstrated outside the Lahore General Hospital on January 11 in a near two-year dispute over implementation of a new service structure that will increase wages and benefits of government doctors. Despite repeated promises, the government has failed to implement the new structure. Doctors said they will continue their protest until the government honours its previous commitments to resolve their issues.

In February, following nearly a year of protest, the YDA ended a month-long state-wide strike on a vague government assurance that a newly-formed Senate committee will examine issues in the health system and make recommendations to parliament by the end of the month. The YDA says that only 20 percent of their demands had been implemented.

Philippines' call centre workers protest

Over 40 employees of Leadamorphosis, a business process outsourcing (BPO) company in Cebu have been holding a vigil outside their workplace since January 11 in a bid to prevent management removing company equipment and assets.

Leadamorphosis falsely told its 120 call-centre workers on January 8 that it was shutting down temporarily because of earthquake-induced structural damage. Workers though checked with city hall officials and found no truth to the claim.

On Monday, over 100 Leadamorphosis employees marched from the company's head office in Cebu to the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the National Labor Relations Commission to file cases against management. A worker told the media that Leadamorphosis failed to submit required notices at the DOLE for bankruptcy, insolvency, redundancy or closure, and that workers had not received their last pay and mandatory deductions for the last quarter of last year had not been remitted.

DOLE has called a tripartite meeting involving the Inter-Call Center Association of Workers (ICCAW), and BPO employers to attempt to resolve the issue. ICCAW has demanded that BPO companies be required to post cash bonds equivalent to one month of salaries and benefits of its total workforce. The bond requirement was proposed but was not enacted at the height of the hasty shutdown of another Cebu City-based BPO company called Direct Access that left some 600 employees with unpaid wages, commissions, overtime pay and separation benefits.

Coles warehouse workers in Victoria issue strike notice

Around 400 warehouse workers at Coles Linfox at Trugannina in Melbourne's outer western suburbs voted for 24-hour strike action on January 17 over a new work agreement. The workers, who have joined the National Union of Workers, want an agreement that provides parity wages with other Coles warehouse employees. They are currently paid between $5 and $6 an hour less than other Coles warehouse employees. Many are labour hire casuals working as pickers and packers without sick pay or holidays.

In October last year about 200 of the workers held two lunchtime protests against workplace bullying. Linfox stood down two delegates for speaking to the media. They have since been reinstated.

Fiji hotel strike leaders charged

Following a limited four-hour strike by 400 workers at the Sheraton Fiji Resort and the Westin Denarau Resort and Spa in Nadi on December 31, a travel ban has been imposed on five union members of the National Union of Catering and Hospitality and Tourism Industries and a representative of the Land Owning Committee (LOC) by the Nadi Magistrates court. Although the hotel chain management Starwood Hotels agreed to meet all workers' grievances, the six were charged with unlawful strike, released on $1,000 bail each and ordered to report to Nadi Police Station every Friday until the charges are heard in court on March 17.

Workers had walked out to oppose cuts to staff benefits, such as maternity leave and overtime pay. A spokesman for the LOC, which negotiated the end to the strike, said that temporary staff entitled to permanency would be made permanent and all entitlements paid within fourteen days.

The government had declared the strike illegal, claiming it breached Section 175 of the Employment Relations Promulgation (ERP) 2007. The draconian ERP requires workers to provide notice of a secret ballot to the Registrar of Trade Unions 21 days prior to any strike action.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site