

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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Bangladeshi garment workers continue strikes and protests

Garment workers from the Naaz and Rars and Nikita factories rallied outside the Narayanganj Press Club, near Dhaka, on January 29 to demand the official monthly minimum wage of 5,300 taka (\$US68). A survey by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in January found that 40 percent of garment factories in Dhaka and surrounding areas had failed to implement a BGMEA-government minimum wage introduced on December 1.

On January 22 at least 15 garment workers of Fa Apparels in Hemayetpur on the outskirts of Dhaka were injured when police baton-charged a 200-strong protest on the Dhaka-Aricha highway. Workers said that company owners closed the plant on January 15 without paying wages for November and December. A worker told the media that it was not the first time they had protested over unpaid wages.

The ongoing protests follow mass garment workers' strikes and demonstrations throughout 2013 for the minimum monthly wage to be nearly tripled to \$US100.

Sri Lankan public school teachers and principals demonstrate

Government school teachers and principals rallied in the Colombo and Kandy districts on January 23 to protest pay anomalies and promotion and salary delays. According to the Teachers-Principals Trade Union Joint Committee, more than 70,000 teachers have been waiting for promotions since 2010 and that salary anomalies and arrears due to be rectified in 1997 have not been implemented.

At least five unions participated in the protests—the Independent Ceylon Teachers' Union, Catholic Teachers' Union, Piriven Teachers' Services Union, Principals

Services Union and the Ceylon Teachers' Services Union—as part of an ongoing national campaign.

India: Karnataka contract health workers protest

Contract workers, including doctors, for the Health and Family Welfare Department in Hyderabad-Karnataka region held a day-long sit-down protest outside the Deputy Commissioner's Office in Gulbarga on January 25. The health workers were demanding regularisation of their services and the filling of vacancies.

The protesters said they had been employed without job security for over a decade. Workers have threatened to strike if the government does not fulfil their demands within a month.

Andhra Pradesh Road Transport Corporation union cancel strike

Hours before a scheduled January 27 strike, the Andhra Pradesh Road Transport Corporation Employees Union and the Telengana Mazdoor Union cancelled the walkout following a government-union agreement. The government and unions signed an interim deal for a 27 percent basic pay rise until April 2014 when a wages review would be completed. The salary increases are supposed to be backdated to April 2013.

Two other unions that threatened to strike—the Staff & Workers Union and the National Mazdoor Union—did not sign the agreement.

Cambodian garment workers continue strikes and

protests

Around 2,000 garment workers protested outside the Vattanac Industrial Park 2 in Phnom Penh's Dangkao district on January 28. Workers want reinstatement of 11 employees they claim were unfairly dismissed after a union was established at the Chinese-owned Dongdu Textile factory. Garment workers began strike action on January 25, after the sacking of two leading Cambodia Union Workers Labour for Development officials. Nine more union delegates were sacked several days later for organising the walkout.

Negotiations between worker representatives, factory management and labour ministry officials stalled during the week. Dongdu, which produces clothes for Bonds, the Australian retailer, claims that the workers were sacked because their contracts had expired.

On January 26, ten people were injured when riot police, using batons and electric cattle prods, tried to prevent hundreds of garment workers from entering Freedom Park in Phnom Penh where they planned to protest over low wages and the continued detention of 23 people following mass industrial action last year. The demonstration was the first attempted at Freedom Park since January 4, when district security guards tore down tents and drove out workers who had occupied the area for 20 days demanding a minimum wage increase.

The ongoing protests follow walkouts last December at over 400 factories to demand a \$160 monthly wage. Union officials ended last year's strike action after a violent military police crackdown by the Hun Sen government. Four workers were killed, more than 20 seriously injured, and at least 23 detained, facing serious criminal charges. Over 100 labour union representatives were dismissed from 12 factories following the return to work.

Indonesian airline workers strike

Two hundred pilots from the state-owned domestic carrier PT Merpati Nusantara Airlines struck on January 26, grounding all the company's aircraft at the Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in Jakarta. The walkout was over the non-payment of salaries.

A Merpati airlines union official said pilots would strike indefinitely on February 1 until management paid the salaries of 1,600 employees. According to the union, workers were paid their November salaries in January and

are still waiting for December and January wages. Management claims it cannot pay salaries until March or April. The debt-strapped company has debts totalling \$US533 million.

Adelaide bus drivers impose bans

Bus drivers from public transport providers Transfield and SouthLink in Adelaide, the South Australian capital, have begun industrial action in a dispute over a new work agreement. Around 600 members of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) stopped collecting fares or validating tickets on January 28. A four-hour strike planned for February 2 was called off due to expected extreme weather conditions.

Drivers want a 5 percent pay rise, a work rosters review to reduce fatigue, and for improved driver security. The companies claim that the South Australian Labor government's contract with them only allows for a 2.8 percent wage increase.

A TWU official told the media that Adelaide's third bus company, Torrens Transit, recently agreed to a 4.5 percent wage rise. He said, however, that the union was willing to "compromise" in the Transfield and SouthLink dispute. The government is seeking legal advice on whether it can intervene in the dispute.

New Zealand polytechnic workers strike

Around 220 academic and support staff at the Universal College of Learning (UCOL) on New Zealand's North Island, walked off the job for two hours on January 30 in a dispute over wages. Pickets were set up on campuses at Palmerston North, Whanganui and Masterton.

The action was spurred by a breakdown in negotiations between the Tertiary Education Union and UCOL. The union wants an across-the-board 2.5 percent pay rise, but UCOL said there would be no across-the-board increase for staff this year and that separate negotiations will be held on each campus.



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