

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

26 April 2014

China: Yue Yuen shoe factory workers' strike in second week

An estimated 40,000 workers at the Taiwanese-owned Yue Yuen Industrial Company in south-east China's Dongguan City in the Pearl River Delta have been on strike since April 14 over long-standing complaints about pay and entitlements.

The strike erupted after management reneged on a commitment that ended a one-day strike on April 5. Management promised to resolve the dispute but later announced that it would sign new contracts with employees on May 1 and refused to resolve the main issue of unpaid entitlements.

Workers alleged that Yue Yuen had either not paid, or under-paid retirement and housing accounts contributions for nearly a decade. Many workers allege that contributions had not been deposited in their accounts since 2006.

On Tuesday Yue Yuen offered to make back-payments for social security and housing, pay full contributions on May 1 and a \$37 monthly cost-of-living allowance. This was rejected by strikers who want a 30 percent pay rise, a better-worded commitment to future contributions, and all outstanding contributions paid in full.

Yue Yuen is the largest branded footwear manufacturer in the world producing shoes for Nike, Adidas, Reebok, Converse and other major brands. The company has begun shifting production from Dongguan to inland provinces as well as Vietnam and Indonesia where wages and benefits are more heavily suppressed.

Bus workers in Shenzhen on strike

Thousands of workers at Shenzhen East Public Transport Company staged a mass protest outside the district government offices on April 20 over several demands. Witnesses said one worker was hospitalised and five others arrested when hundreds of police with shields and batons attacked the peaceful demonstration. Drivers from the Shenzhen West Bus Co. joined the strike the following day.

According to China Labor Watch (CLW) company representatives were dragging workers out of their dormitories on Monday and forcing them back to work. The company, which operates about 200 lines in the city, has so far refused to negotiate.

Workers' demands include a more transparent wage calculation system, overtime payments in arrears, fewer working days, and the abolition of a penalty scheme that forced drivers to pay for any vehicle damage or face dismissal.

CLW reported that employees paid five yuan per month in trade union fees but none of the drivers knew anything about the union. The Shenzhen Federation of Trade Unions has not commented on the strike.

India: Toyota workers end strike with no gain

Over 4,200 permanent workers at Toyota Kirloskar Motor car assembly plants in Bidadi near Bangalore have returned to work after the Karnataka state government directed the company to end the lockout it imposed on March 16 in a dispute over wages and conditions. Although the Toyota Motors Employees Union (TMEU) previously offered to reduce its demand for a 4,000-rupee salary rise to 3,100 rupees, management still refused to reinstate 30 victimised unionists or drop its demand for workers to sign a "good conduct" bond.

On April 17, the Karnataka government, concerned that the dispute was damaging the state economy, declared that the lockout violated the Industrial Disputes Act and called on management to drop the "good conduct" bond.

The TMEU agreed to order its members back to work and have all issues, including the wage claim and suspensions, heard in an industrial tribunal. The suspended union representatives cannot return to work until the inquiry is completed.

Sixth week of Kerala railway cleaners' strike

Seventy-two cleaning and sanitation contract workers at the Shoranur railway station, the largest in India's south-west state of Kerala, have been on strike since March 15 in a dispute for a pay increase.

The railway authority is using 15 railway employees from nearby Palakkad and Kozhikode stations in an attempt to break the strike. Strikers are demanding that their daily wage be increased from 207 rupees (\$US3.4) to 500 rupees.

Hyderabad municipal workers oppose privatisation

On April 21, over 3,000 Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) sanitation workers, including drivers and labourers, walked off the job in protest over privatisation of their jobs. The GHMC plans to hand over their door-to-door garbage collection in the eastern zone to a private company—Ramky Enviro Engineers. The strike was organised by the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Employees Union.

In February, some 25,000 contract sanitation workers ended a five-day strike after the GHMC agreed to lift monthly salaries from 6,700 rupees (\$US109) to 11,000 rupees, and increase Provident Fund and Employees State Insurance payments.

Pakistan: Lady Health Workers threaten national protests

Lady Health Workers' employees have threatened to launch a national protest if the Pakistan government fails to pay overdue salaries within a week. Although the federal government claimed that the funds were released to provincial governments in March, thousands of workers still have not received salaries since January.

The services of the more than 100,000 female workers are crucial in Pakistan, where health facilities remain dismal or not available at all. The government frequently delays wage payments and refuses to regularise the jobs of tens of thousands whose current salaries are just 7,000 rupees (\$US77) a month. Protesting Lady Health Workers in Lahore were violently attacked by police in February.

Bangladesh garment workers demand termination pay

Bonds Fashions workers in the Savar industrial area, 24 km from Dhaka, demonstrated on April 16 to demand compensation and termination pay from their closed plant. The dismissed workers were told that they would receive termination pay and other benefits on May 10 but were only paid a half month's salary. According to limited media reports, the workers were holding a factory director captive until an agreement was signed.

Cambodian factory workers strike

More than 2,000 workers at three factories in Bavet City, Svay Rieng province, Cambodia struck this week, claiming their employers owed them money.

About 500 workers at the You Li factory, which makes baby clothes, went on strike because management refused to pay them when they failed to report for work on April 17, the day after the Khmer New Year three-day holiday. Management previously rejected workers' requests to take the extra day off. You Li workers said they would remain on strike until management agreed not to cut their pay.

Meanwhile, 2,000 workers at two bicycle factories in Bavet City struck on April 19 after management refused to pay a \$50 bonus given to workers from another nearby factory. The workers had been paid \$50 each as a reward for not striking during the past few months. Smart Tech bicycle factory workers have also demanded reinstatement of 45 fellow employees fired for leading a previous strike.

Indonesia: Sacked Adidas shoe factory workers protest

On April 17, hundreds of former PT Panarub Dwikarya workers protested outside the company's compound in Tangerang, 25 km west of Indonesia's capital Java. The workers were demanding the company, which manufactures Adidas shoes, rehire them or give them severance pay and health insurance.

The workers are part of 1,300 employees who protested in 2012 for better working conditions and workers' welfare. PT Panarub responded by "offering" the workers a voluntary resignation with severance pay of 1.6 million rupiah (\$US133) or outright dismissal.

The Union of Garment, Textile and Shoes Workers has isolated the dismissed workers who protest at the company compound every Thursday. The union has refused to mobilise any other garment workers to support the dismissed Panarub employees.

Philippines electronics manufacturing workers demonstrate

Around 1,700 employees of electronics manufacturer NXP (formerly Philips) in Cabuyao city have been protesting on factory premises and picketing outside the factory gate for several months in a dispute for a new collective agreement. The company has refused to negotiate or change its original offer of a 3.5 percent wage increase.

This month the company began increasing the number of security personnel in and around the factory and on April 9, a legal holiday, management accused workers of conducting an illegal strike and issued them with an ES (explanation slip).

On April 16, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) took over the dispute and ordered the company and union delegates into negotiations at the DOLE office in Manila. Around 300 workers are picketing the DOLE building while negotiations proceed.

New South Wales meat workers strike

Around 300 Wingham Beef Exports (WBE) workers in Wingham, New South Wales walked off the job for 24 hours on April 17 in a dispute for a new three-year enterprise bargaining agreement. Workers want a 5 percent increase for their lowest paid employees in the first year, followed by a further 4 percent for each of the two years remaining. Higher paid workers—boners, slicers and slaughtermen—want 3.5 percent in the first year and a further 3 percent the following years.

According to the Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU), about 80 percent of WBE workers fall under the lower pay agreement. This includes cleaners, packers, freezer room workers and others. These workers currently earn around \$17.20 an hour and even granted an increase will still receive less than those in many other export companies.

After 30 weeks of negotiations the company offered 3 percent annual pay increases for the lowest paid, effective from December, with the loss of other benefits that would drop their pay by 12 percent. The trade-offs include ending rostered days off and butchers' picnic day, along with other offsets. The company also wants to extend the ordinary working day. Meat workers have rejected the company proposal.

South Australian Armaguard workers apply to strike

Armaguard security drivers servicing half of South Australia's automatic teller machines (ATMs) have applied to Australia's Fair Work Commission for protective industrial action in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Their action will include stop-work meetings and bans on overtime and servicing ATMs. The company has threatened to lock out strikers and use interstate employees to service ATMs.

The Transport Workers Union (TWU) and the company have been negotiating for more than six months during which union officials

persuaded the security drivers to accept a wage freeze in the first year and a minimal increase of 3 percent in the second year. This was rejected by Armaguard which claims their employees are paid a base rate 20 percent higher than their competitors.



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