

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

11 October 2014

## Footwear workers storm Cambodian factory

Thousands of striking workers forced their way past security guards and stormed into the Juhui factory in Kampong Cham district on Monday throwing stones at Taiwanese managers. The incident was sparked by reports that one of the managers had grabbed a female worker by the shirt collar and began slapping her.

Two Taiwanese supervisors and four female workers were injured in the melee which ended after around 100 riot police were mobilised to the plant.

The 5,000 workers have been on strike for over a month over demands relating to overtime payments and lunch allowances. The company initially responded to the strike by firing the entire workforce. A court injunction sought by the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers' Democratic Union required the company to restore the positions but it has so far refused to rehire the sacked workers. Negotiations between the company and unions are set to resume in the next few days.

## Cambodian garment workers to march for pay increase

An estimated 3,000 workers from six garment unions will participate in a march in Phnom Penh on October 12 to demand an increase in the industrial minimum wage. The action was called after the Ministry of Labour delayed holding a meeting with the unions to discuss an increase.

A union spokesman said workers would rally at Freedom Park before marching to the US and European embassies and then to the offices of various clothing brands.

The minimum monthly wage for clothing workers is currently just \$US100. Clothing employers have offered to increase this to \$110 a month but the umbrella organisation for the six unions—the Collective Union of Movement of Workers—wants an improved offer.

## Pakistan: Teaching staff in Gilgit-Baltistan demand promotions

Professors and lecturers at government colleges across Gilgit-Baltistan went on strike and boycotted classes on October 2 over government delays in implementing promotions. The G-B Professors and Lecturers Association (G-BPLA) said there are over 350 professors and lecturers who have been working at colleges for decades but have not yet been promoted.

The G-BPLA is demanding the government implement a timescale promotion system similar to those in other areas of Pakistan where

teaching staff have gained advancements and salary increases. In 2012 the government promised to implement this sort of scheme but it has never materialised. Following the strike, a spokesman for the G-B Chief Minister's office announced that the matter was "under consideration."

## India: Tamil Nadu cotton-mill strike called off

The Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) have called off a strike by workers at the Pankaja Cotton Mill in Coimbatore. The workers went on strike on September 22 in opposition to plans by management to cut jobs and pay. On October 6 some workers began a hunger strike inside the mill.

The union ended the actions when management agreed to implement a voluntary retirement scheme to achieve downsizing instead of using retrenchments. The CITU is affiliated to the Stalinist Communist Party of India (M) and the INTUC is an affiliate of the bourgeois Indian National Congress.

## Indian workers protest for wages and conditions

On October 6 sanitation and water storage workers in Dindigul district protested outside the district collector's office seeking to serve a petition on the chief minister demanding job permanency and improved wages and conditions.

The Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU) members want a 15,000-rupee (\$244.5) monthly wage, a 500-rupee allowance for cleaning overhead water tanks, provision of uniforms, and a 3,000-rupee pension payment.

## Sri Lankan railway workers fight for pay increase

Station masters, engine drivers, controllers, guards, foremen and supervisors across Sri Lanka went on strike on October 8 demanding the rail authorities address wage anomalies. The workers want an increase in the monthly recruitment salary from 13,500 rupees (\$US103.6) to 16,500 rupees.

All night mail-trains to and from Badulla, Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Palai were cancelled and other services have come to a standstill. Around 2,300 workers participated in the action.

The Professionals Trade Union Alliance (PTUA) claims it has been

asking the rail authorities to address the issues over the last three years. Management promised at an August meeting to forward the union's complaints to the Salaries Commission for a solution but there has been no response.

### **Bangladesh: Tuba garment workers demonstrate for outstanding pay**

Hundreds of workers from five Tuba Group-owned factories demonstrated on October 4 demanding the payment of outstanding salaries for August and September and of festival bonuses. The workers rallied outside the Bangladesh Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in Bhaban after gathering at BGMEA vice-president Shahidullah Azim's residence.

Tuba Group managing director Delwar Hossain claims he does not have enough money to pay the workers and that he had hoped to use an insurance settlement from the fire at his Tazreen Fashions factory in Ashulia district in November 2012.

The factory fire—the worst in the country's history—claimed the lives of at least 171 workers. Hossain was jailed over the tragedy but was recently released on bail promising to arrange to meet outstanding payment to the workers.

A union spokesperson for the Tuba Group Sramik Sangram Committee announced there would be another protest rally on October 15 and that further actions would be announced at that time.

### **Australia: Dock workers strike in pay dispute**

Dock workers at DP World Australia facilities in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane took limited industrial action this week involving a series of separate rolling stoppages, lasting between four and eight hours. The company and the Maritime Workers Union have been involved in protracted negotiations since the previous work agreement expired in January this year.

The union wants a 4 percent annual pay increase over the life of the new work agreement. The company has offered a 3 percent annual wage rise for four years and an additional 1.5 percent in exchange for productivity and efficiency increases including new rostering systems and the removal of picnic days. It has dismissed other union claims as “unaffordable”.

This week's stoppage was the first industrial action by the MUA at any of the company's facilities since 2012 when the union called off industrial action and struck an “in principle” agreement to deliver productivity gains demanded by management.

DP World Australia's parent company, Dubai-based DP World, is the third largest stevedoring company in the world, operating more than 60 terminals across six continents.

### **Vegetable-processing workers step up industrial action**

Some 200 workers at Simplot vegetable-processing plants in Bathurst and Kelso in New South Wales decided to strike for 24-hours on October 10. The strike follows the imposition of work bans over last weekend by Simplot workers in Tasmania following the breakdown in protracted pay negotiations between the company and Australian Manufacturing Workers

Union (AMWU).

Simplot wants a wage freeze for year one, 2 percent increases in years two and three at its Kelso and Bathurst plants, and 2 percent each year for the next three years at Ulverstone and Davenport factories in Tasmania. The offers are below the inflation rate and are in effect a pay cut.

The workers are demanding a 4 percent per annum pay increase over the life of the new agreement and the retention of all working conditions. Last year, Simplot axed 110 jobs at the Bathurst plant. The unions did not organise any industrial action to oppose the job cuts.

### **New Zealand bank workers vote for national industrial action**

Workers employed by the ANZ bank have voted overwhelmingly to take national industrial action in support of an improved pay offer and in opposition to management moves to impose adverse changes to working conditions. The vote follows industrial action by workers at several ANZ branches over the past fortnight.

ANZ management wants to introduce a highly-casualised work system where employees will be informed month-by-month which days they will be rostered on and the starting and finishing times. The changes will impact on the ability of workers to arrange family and other commitments such as undertaking tertiary study with set lecture times.

At the same time, the bank has only offered pay increases of just 2 to 3 percent, despite having raked in a \$1.37 billion profit last year and cutting its workforce by 10 percent, the equivalent of 7,400 full-time positions. ANZ is New Zealand's largest and most profitable lender.

### **Freeport workers lift blockade at Papua gold mine**

Some 2,000 workers from the US-owned mining giant PT Freeport Indonesia (FI) this week have reportedly lifted a two-day road blockade outside the company's Grasberg open-pit copper mine in Tembagapura in Papua province.

The striking workers imposed the blockade to protest against alleged workplace-safety violations in the wake of a recent accident that killed four employees. They demanded that management take responsibility for 44 deaths at its mines in the last two years. Thirty-five workers were killed at the remote Papua mine complex last year, including 28 who perished in a tunnel collapse.

The workers decided to allow access to the mine after the company agreed to meet with the Freeport Workers Union to discuss operational safety issues and on the condition that their demands were read aloud to company officials.



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