

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

13 December 2014

Indonesian workers protest for wage rise

Tens of thousands of workers protested across Indonesia on Wednesday in a nationwide strike to demand higher wages after President Joko Widodo increased fuel prices. The rise of about 30 percent last month in fuel prices has meant a 50 percent drop in workers' purchasing power.

Over 10,000 workers headed into the capital from industrial areas in the greater Jakarta region and blocked the central Hotel Indonesia roundabout, waving flags and listening to speeches from union leaders. On November 25, thousands of workers, from 800 local industries, stopped work and marched in Tangerang city, 25 km west of Jakarta, after the Jakarta governor approved a 2015 minimum wage of 2.7 million rupiah (\$219) a month. Unions in Jakarta want the minimum wage set at 3 million rupiah (\$242) a month.

The protests followed rallies by thousands of workers in most Indonesian cities on November 14 to demand the minimum wage be raised to \$266 a month. Unions also want compulsory pensions, health insurance improvements and an end to outsourcing.

Numbers at Wednesday's protest in Jakarta were 40,000 lower than anticipated after Indonesia's largest union, the Confederation of Indonesian Workers' Union (KSPSI), told its 4.6 million members not to participate in the national strike. The KSPSI was the only legally registered trade union centre in Indonesia during the Suharto era.

Cambodia: Siem Reap airport workers end strike

Around 150 workers at the Siem Reap International Airport in Cambodia's northwest ended an 11-day strike on December 4, after Cambodia Airport Management Services (CAMS) agreed to enter into tripartite talks with the union and the government. Workers walked off the job on November 24, accusing airport management of breaking several conditions in their March collective bargaining agreement.

According to the Cambodia Tourism and Service Workers Federation, the company, which employs some 500 people at the airport, has been hiring subcontractors and directing employees to work outside their job descriptions.

Thailand garment workers protest over sackings

Laid-off garment workers from jeans producer Mc Group Plc protested outside the Thailand stock exchange in Bangkok on Monday to demand reinstatement. They complained that the company unfairly sacked 15

workers in the maintenance division in November without prior notice.

A representative from the Mc Jeans Labour Union disputed company claims that the sackings were due to financial difficulties. She alleged that the company executives had just received six-month bonuses and that the sackings were due to labour outsourcing.

The protest continued for about 20 minutes until 10am when the stock market opened.

India: Andhra Pradesh film industry workers end strike

Around 14,000 workers employed in the Telugu language (Tollywood) film industry in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh ended a two-week strike on December 6, after reaching a compromise with producers over low wages, lack of employment regulations and the hiring of non-union labour.

The Andhra Pradesh Film Industry Employees Union agreed that producers can appoint technicians at their will and that they don't have to be members of the federation. The federation did not report if an agreement was reached on wages and employment regulations.

Telangana power utility contract workers protest

On December 8, hundreds of members of the Telangana State United Electricity Employees Union, representing 2,600 contract workers of Genco, Transco and Discom in Warangal district, demonstrated at the Northern Power Distribution Company Limited office. They were demanding equal pay for equal work, payment of wages directly by the government and scrapping of outsourcing.

Workers are concerned that the chief minister, who promised to consider permanent employment for contract employees, will postpone dealing with the issue.

Tamil Nadu transport workers demonstrate

Around 15,000 workers from Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC) divisions in Madurai, Dindigul and Viridhunagar rallied in Madurai on December 9 over several outstanding demands. Represented by ten unions, the protesters want confirmation of employees who had served continuously for 240 days, the payment of nine months' Dearness Allowance arrears and outstanding social security payments to retired employees.

The protest ended late in the evening after government officials gave assurances that all demands would be met.

Pakistan: Local government workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa strike

Local government employees in Pakistan's northwest province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been on a state-wide strike since December 3 to demand a wage rise. Most municipal services throughout the province are affected, including garbage collection and water supply.

District representatives of the Local Government Employees' Federation extended the strike on Monday to include all the municipal committees and tehsil municipal administrations across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. They threatened to close the Karakoram Highway (between China and Pakistan) if the government failed to begin negotiations by December 10.

Workers complained that the federal government had increased public sector pay scales but ignored local government employees.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa doctors threaten to escalate strike

Provincial Doctors Association (PDA) members have threatened to widen strike action in public hospitals in the provincial capital Peshawar to include all hospitals in the province if authorities fail to meet their demands by December 12.

The doctors want salary increases for trainee medical and house officers, accommodation for junior doctors and the resolution of work problems of the Peshawar Postgraduate Medical Institute. A PDA representative threatened to close three main hospitals within a week if the workers' demands were not met. All other government hospitals in the province would be closed during the second phase.

Dock workers locked out in Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members employed by Dubai Ports World in Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle were locked out on Thursday after planning to take protected industrial action for a new enterprise agreement. The company announced that it would seek arbitration in the Fair Work Commission.

The planned action included a shutdown on Thursday at the Melbourne terminal for 32 hours and Sydney for 20 hours and at Fremantle for 4 hours on Friday. The company's Brisbane terminal is not affected.

Negotiations between the MUA and DP World for a new enterprise agreement have been ongoing for ten months. The MUA says that the company wants to eliminate penalty rates for new employees, increase hours of work and has failed to consult with the union automation at the port facilities. The union has also claimed the company is using forced redundancies of existing staff in order to increase the casuals in its workforce.

An MUA official told the media that the dispute was not about money but hours of work, job security, waterfront automation and redundancy provisions. The union wants to work with management over the introduction of automation and job losses.

Federal public servants begin limited industrial action

Some 15,000 public sector workers in Centrelink, Medicare and Child Support, part of the Department of Human Services (DHS), have begun "low level" industrial action in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement.

Called by the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), the action includes reading messages of protest to call centre customers and not wearing the prescribed uniform to work. The harmless protests are aimed at dragging out the dispute and wearing down the resolve of members. Management has responded by threatening to cut workers' pay if they participate in the action.

Earlier this year the department offered a new employment agreement that would remove their 15.4 percent superannuation guarantee, extend the working day by six minutes and cut their leave entitlements in exchange for a 0.75 percent per annum pay rise. With inflation currently running at 2.3 percent, the "offer" would amount to \$2,500–\$3,000 per year pay cut.

Workplace agreements covering 160,000 public sector workers in over 70 departments are up for renewal. Months of negotiations between the DHS and the CPSU have failed. Last week, Department of Veterans' Affairs workers endorsed future industrial action, following failed negotiations over pay and conditions.

Victorian elevator workers' lockout in seventh week

The lockout of 160 maintenance and construction workers at Otis Elevators in Victoria's capital Melbourne is in its seventh week. The company locked out the workers following authorised stoppages and work bans over a new enterprise agreement in October by Australian Manufacturing Union and Electrical Trades Union members. The workers are maintaining a picket at the company's headquarters in South Melbourne.

Otis workers have rejected company attempts to scrap an existing agreement clause limiting casual employment to 12 weeks. Otis wants to increase its use of casual workers and is demanding that current employees be available on any five days out of seven. It also wants to extend the working week by two hours and reduce the overtime loading rate. The company has offered a pay increase of only 1 percent in the first year of the new agreement.

Northern Territory public school teachers protest

A group of Northern Territory public school teachers demonstrated in the territory's capital Darwin on December 5 over education funding changes. The Country Liberal Party government is moving to introduce so-called global budgets that make schools responsible for their own budgets.

Teachers condemned the scheme saying it was a smoke screen to allow education funding cuts. They complained that some schools' funding had already been cut by half, causing the axing of 100 teachers' jobs. Some schools lost 50 percent of their staff.

The Australian Education Union NT branch has accepted the government's latest pay offer, even though the government refused to guarantee staffing ratios. The pay offer includes a 6 percent pay rise this year, followed by 3 percent rises for the two following years.

New Zealand: ANZ bank employees strike

One hundred ANZ bank employees from the company's call centre and branches in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, walked off the job on December 5 and marched to the company's largest branch in Queen Street in a dispute over a new work agreement. The long-running dispute follows protests and limited strike action which began in October with a five-hour strike. No concrete action has been taken since.

ANZ management wants to introduce a highly casualised work system where employees are informed month-by-month which days they will be rostered on and their start and finish times. First Union claimed that its members were willing to compromise and allow up to 20 percent of the workforce to be flexible but the company wants every new worker employed on the new insecure work agreements. The bank also wants to reduce overtime rates.

While FIRST Union has convinced its members to accept ANZ's conditions in the last round of industrial bargaining, employees have rejected a pay rise offer of between 2.75 and 3 percent in the first year of the agreement.



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