

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

7 November 2015

Chinese brewery workers strike to defend jobs

Workers at Shanghai, Kunshan and Lianyungang breweries owned by the Japan-based Suntory Holdings walked out and demonstrated outside their plants late last month over job security. The company recently announced it was withdrawing from its loss-making joint venture with Tsingtao, China's second largest brewery.

The brewery workers ended the strike after management said that there would not be any redundancies. The strikers said that they were concerned that their union had not previously received any job security assurances from the company or an acceptable retrenchment payment.

Indonesian workers protest over reduced minimum wage

Thousands of workers demonstrated in Jakarta on October 30 against the Indonesian government's new formula for calculating the minimum wage. Unions claim that when the new regulation is applied in 2016, Jakarta's minimum wage will be 100,000 rupiah (\$US7.35) lower.

The previous formula is based on 84 basic commodities and other daily needs of workers. The government's proposed minimum wage will be calculated according to inflation and gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates.

The unions want the minimum monthly wage to be increased by 25 percent, lifting it to 3.32 million rupiah (\$243.8). The Greater Jakarta government has added 70,000 rupiah to the new formula and set the minimum wage at \$226 a month.

Pakistan: Punjab brick kiln workers fight for minimum wage

Brick kiln workers in Toba Tek Singh district in Punjab province are continuing their campaign for the officially mandated 962 rupees (\$US9.22) for 1,000 bricks per day. The workers are often bonded employees and repeatedly have to use their families to meet the 1,000 bricks daily target.

The workers, who are members of the Labour Qaumi Movement, are holding a hunger strike. They ended a previous sit-down protest outside the district labour office in October after government officials falsely promised to arrange a meeting with kiln owners. The kiln owners, however, have refused to pay even the reduced rate of 800 rupees per 1,000 bricks it previously agreed to.

Karachi school teachers demand higher wages

Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) education department teachers held a second round of demonstrations on October 30, demanding seven months' unpaid wages. The Sindh provincial government has delayed salary payments to teachers, pending the outcome of an inquiry into "ghost employees" drawing salaries from the education department.

The teachers called off a protest in September after KMC officials falsely agreed to address their issues. It is now insisting that no one will be paid until the inquiry is finalised. Over 8,000 teachers are affected.

India: Tamil Nadu 108 Ambulance workers protest

Around 1,500 workers of the 108 Ambulance service from Madurai, Vellore, Erode and Thiruvannamalai demonstrated in front of the Collectorate in Vellore on November 2 over several outstanding demands.

The ambulance employees want a 20 percent Diwali festival bonus, an eight-hour day to replace the current 12-hour work rosters, reemployment of retrenched workers and security and privacy for women workers. The Tamil Nadu 108 Ambulance Workers Union has organised demonstrations across the state and warned that it will call strike action if their demands are not met soon.

Karnataka contract nurses protest for permanency

Contract nurses at the Kempegowda Institute of Medical Sciences in Bangalore demonstrated outside the hospital's administration block on October 31. They want permanency for nurses who were employed on a contract basis for three years and a pay increase.

Nurses said management had repeatedly rejected their demands and had retaliated by sacking 165 nurses. Eleven protesting nurses under severe financial stress were hospitalised after taking sleeping pills.

Australian border force workers stood down

About 500 Australian Border Force (ABF) freight and mail inspection division workers were stood down without pay on Wednesday in a dispute with the federal Liberal-National government over a new enterprise bargaining agreement. The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU)

members were about to impose work bans from Wednesday to Friday this week. The government's response is an attempt to head off a broader 24-hour stoppage by ABF and Immigration and Agricultural workers on November 9.

ABF and immigration workers held two-hour stoppages at airports across Australia in September as part of a pay dispute between 160,000 federal public servants and the government. ABF workers have opposed the department's pay offer that effectively cuts current wages and entitlements and leaves some workers \$8,000 a year worse off.

Enterprise agreement negotiations covering 118 federal public servants' agreements have been underway since March 2014. Less than 2 percent of workers have accepted proposed agreements, leaving at least 150,000 without agreements and their wages frozen. The CPSU and other unions have asked for 4 percent annual pay increases for three years with no loss of conditions.

While the government has recently said that it will increase its annual pay increase offer from 1.5 percent to 2 percent for some departments the cuts to conditions will remain.

Queensland Catholic school teachers strike

For the fifth time in two months more than 7,500 staff at 180 Catholic schools across Queensland walked off the job for two hours on Wednesday and Thursday in their pay dispute with the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. Teachers in August rejected the commission's last pay increase offer of 2.5 percent.

The Independent Education Union Queensland and Northern Territory wants the commission to address long-standing pay disparities between Catholic schools in New South Wales and Queensland. It wants a 3.25 percent pay increase.

A union representative said some teachers in Queensland's Catholic schools are paid \$6,792 a year less than their NSW colleagues. Other issues include workload, preparation time and multimedia work. Negotiations between the union and the commission are continuing.

Queensland: Wormald fire technicians locked out

Thirty-seven technicians from fire and safety systems provider Wormald (Queensland) have been locked out since October 2 in a dispute over a new work place agreement. Fire safety services at BP, K-Mart, Target, Swire Cold Storage, Air Services Australia, Telstra, Virgin, Visy, Queensland Rail, Viva Energy, Veolia Water and Brisbane Airport Corporation have been severely affected by the lockout.

According to the Electrical Trades Union, the workers had accepted Wormald's tentative agreement but in the final draft the company added clauses cutting penalty rates and leaving the workers \$16,000 worse off per year if accepted. The union has continued discussions with Wormald, which is owned by TYCO, during the four-week lockout.

New South Wales disability workers strike

Disability workers in Newcastle, 140km north of Sydney, walked off the job for four hours on Wednesday and along with supporters demonstrated

in Newcastle to oppose the closure of government-run disability care centres at Stockton, Tomaree and Kanagra in the Hunter region. At least 150 attended the demonstration.

The state Liberal government has called for "expressions of interest" to build and operate group homes to replace the three centres. At least 1,200 workers from the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care Hunter Residences, are affected by the move to privatisation.

The Public Service Association (PSA) falsely claims that closure of facilities does not reflect the real intent of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and attempted to blame the Liberal state government. Privatisations and jobs cuts, however, were part and parcel of the NDIS, which was initiated by former federal Labor government.

Tasmanian food-processing workers protest sackings

At least 120 workers and supporters demonstrated outside Simplot's food processing plant in Ulverstone on October 28 to oppose the sudden sacking of 12 employees. Workers from Simplot's sister plant in Devonport attended the protest.

An Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) spokesman said workers arriving at the potato-processing plant for the 6 a.m. shift changeover were told by management that they were "redundant," told to clean out their lockers and escorted from the premises. He alleged that the company had already advertised for casual workers to replace the permanent employees.

No industrial action has been called in an attempt to save the jobs. The AMWU's main objection is that there was no consultation, declaring that there had been months of "detailed discussions" with the company for an "orderly" redundancy process.

New Zealand package-manufacturing workers take action

Eighty-five workers at the Sealed Air Packaging manufacturing plant in Porirua on New Zealand's North Island began two weeks of overtime and data entry bans on Monday in a dispute over pay. The Porirua plant makes packaging products for the lamb and meat industry.

According to the E t? union, a merger of the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union and the Service and Food Workers' Union, the company is paying \$6 an hour less than comparable workers around the country. The union wants pay parity with other New Zealand employees and closer to the wages paid to Sealed Air workers in Australia.

New Zealand public servants walk out

Over 1,000 Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) workers walked off the job for two hours on Wednesday following three months of failed negotiations for a new collective agreement. Protest marches were held in Wellington and Auckland. A further stoppage is planned for November 23.

According to a Public Service Association (PSA) official, the MBIE will not offer any across-the-board wage increase and do nothing to improve poor working conditions. The union official claimed that the ministry had also refused to release any information to workers about how pay

outcomes are to be calculated, which made negotiations impossible.

New Zealand conservation workers begin action

Department of Conservation workers overwhelmingly voted on Monday for a month of industrial action in their dispute over a new collective agreement. The Public Service Association (PSA) said its 1,500 members would “work-to-rule” and not respond to any call-outs between November 4 and December 7.

The conservation department employees are concerned that budget cuts have led to understaffing and increased working hours. Neither the PSA demands nor the government’s pay offer have been made public.

Linfox workers in Auckland down tools

Auckland distribution centre workers at the Australian logistics giant Linfox walked off the job at 11.30 a.m. on Wednesday in a collective agreement dispute. They voted to remain on strike until 6 a.m. Thursday. Managers were forced to work on the distribution centre floor during the walkout.

FIRST Union members have rejected a 2 percent pay rise offer from the company that involves a reduction in allowances. The Linfox workers want more than 2 percent to bring them into line with industry standards.



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