

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

23 January 2016

More strikes by Chinese taxi drivers

Thousands of taxi drivers in 13 Chinese cities have been holding strikes and protests since January 8 over low wages and competition from Uber and other app-powered car-hire services.

This follows a two-day strike by drivers of Shenzhen's 16,000 taxis on January 4 over the same issues. The demands include a reduction in the crippling fees extracted by local government-backed taxi companies and for the companies to take over drivers' insurance payments.

Taxi drivers in Chengdu, Changchun, Jinan, Nanjing and Shenyang struck at the end of December over similar issues. Drivers complained that they work 12 hours every day but only receive 4,000 yuan (\$US613) a month, from which they must pay rental fees and other running expenses.

Indonesian metal stamping factory workers end strike

Over 2,000 employees from PT Amtek Engineering in Batam, Riau Islands, ended their five-day strike on January 16 after the Apple subcontractor agreed to meet demands over job certainty. The workers walked out on January 12 and picketed the factory's vehicle entrance, closing down production until ten military personnel forcefully removed them.

Workers wanted clarity with regard to their status following an announcement of the Singaporean company's plan to change its name to Interplex after it had become a subcontractor for Apple. Workers demanded the company dismiss them and give them a severance payment.

A representative from the All-Indonesia Workers Union (SPSI) PT Amtek said the name change was made in July but workers were not told. He claimed that according to Indonesia's labour laws a company is required to pay severance allowances to its employees when a change is made to the company's name or if a company is acquired by another company. Workers ended the strike after PT Amtek owners agreed to drop the name change.

South Korean airline pilots protest

About 100 unionised pilots of South Korea's flagship airline Korean Air demonstrated in front of the company's main office near Gimpo International Airport on January 12. They are demanding a 37 percent pay increase, but the company has offered just 1.9 percent. About 1,900 members of the Korean Pilots Union (KPU) and the New Korean Air Pilot Union will vote on the company's proposal until January 29. The unions

anticipate that the pilots will reject the company's offer.

A KPU spokesman said the pilots' pay had been suppressed for several years. He added that Korean Air pilots are paid relatively less than pilots at other international airlines. Last year, 140 pilots left to join other companies in China and the Middle East on salaries up to three times higher. Korean Air pilots are paid 170 million won (\$US140,334) a year on average.

Cambodian garment workers walk out

Over 650 employees from the H.R. Grand Garment factory in Kandal province, southeast Cambodia, went on strike on Monday after their union representative was fired. The sacking of Yern Sophindara, 37, president of the Khmer Union Federation of Workers Spirit, was in response to a strike by workers in the factory. Management told the provincial Labour Council that Yern could return to work if she dropped the demand for higher wages.

Filipino pharmaceutical workers protest

Around 200 medical representatives employed at the Philippines subsidiary of the French pharmaceutical giant Sanofi-Aventis demonstrated on January 19 in Angeles, Cebu, Bacolod, Davao and Iloilo. Three months of talks for a new collective bargaining agreement remained deadlocked.

The Sanofi-Aventis Employees Union said ten items, including a wage increase, remain in dispute. Workers said they want a living wage that is commensurate to their labour productivity and company profitability.

India: Jharkhand municipal workers on indefinite strike

Workers at the Ranchi Municipal Corporation (RMC), Jharkhand walked out on an indefinite strike on January 19 over long-standing demands. The corporation failed to distribute unpaid wages by the deadline of January 14 set by the RMC Men's Workers Union.

The demands are for payment of arrears as per the fifth pay commission for around 800 employees, increases in family and regular retirement pensions from between 1,500 and 3,200 rupees to 20,000 rupees, and provision of jobs on compassionate grounds. A union spokesman said the demands had been pending for two years.

facing similar issues.

Punjab sanitation workers end strike

Sanitation workers employed by the solid waste management contracting company JITF Jindal Infrastructure Limited called off their six-day strike in Jalandhar on January 19 after management agreed to their demands. The company reached agreement with workers after Jalandhar residents made formal complaints over tonnes of rotting garbage in the city's streets.

The demands of the workers were timely payment of monthly wages and the company's share of the provident fund, and the transfer of a "rude" company manager. The company replaced its regional manager as part of the agreement with workers.

Jammu Kashmir food distribution workers on strike

Food distribution workers at state-owned CAPD (Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution) stores across the state of Jammu Kashmir have been on strike since January 8. The Food & Allied Workers Union (J&K) is demanding a wage review to compensate for no increase since 2012.

Other demands are for minimum wages at par with Food Corporation of India workers, increases in loading/unloading pay per bag to be reviewed every six months, the release of wages before the 10th of every month and implementation of a pension scheme.

Pakistan: Sindh health workers oppose privatisation

Members of the Pakistan Paramedical Staff Association (PPSA) demonstrated outside the Karachi Press Club on January 16 to oppose the privatisation of Sindh government hospitals. The protest followed a strike by doctors and paramedical staff at the Dadu Civil Hospital on January 5 over the issue.

The PPSA alleged that the Sindh government is privatising 219 government hospitals in 24 districts throughout the province. Workers demanded that the government stop privatising hospitals and meet the chronic shortage of staff and medicines.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa health workers demonstrate for pay and benefits

Workers at the state-run Lady Reading Hospital in Peshawar held a demonstration at the hospital on January 13, demanding that a "financial package" agreed to by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government in November be implemented within 15 days. The demonstration included paramedics, nurses, sanitary workers and clerks.

The protest was called by the Health Employees Coordination Council, which was represented by various unions at the hospital. The unions have warned that they would begin legal action under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Medical Teaching Institutions Reforms Act 2015. By doing so, however, they are preventing a joint struggle of broad sections of workers who are

Utility workers continue anti-privatisation campaign

Another round of one-day protests and office closures was held across Pakistan on Tuesday by workers of the Water and Power Development Authority and its power distribution companies against the planned privatisation of the state-owned power utilities. The long-running ineffective campaign is being conducted by the All Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union.

Workers in multiple cities enthusiastically joined the protests, boycotting duties and locking offices. At the rallies, union leaders issued futile demands that the government shelve its privatisation plans. The government agreed to implement the demands of the International Monetary Fund and plans to privatise power distribution facilities of Kot Addu Power Company by June and Faisalabad Electric Supply Company by September. Other state enterprises, including in aviation and airports, health and education, are being targeted by the government.

Australian dock workers strike

Stevedores at shipping container ports in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Fremantle walked off the job for 24 hours on Monday. Seven months of negotiations for a new enterprise agreement (EA) between the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and Patrick Stevedores (owned by logistics company Asciano) reached a deadlock. An estimated 44 percent of the freight moving through Australia's docks was affected.

Negotiations over the new EA were held under the threat of the loss of several hundred jobs as Patrick implements its \$350 million plan to install automated robot cranes. Some 270 jobs at Port Botany in Sydney will be axed. This follows the axing of 97 stevedores' jobs at Hutchison's Port Holdings terminals at Brisbane and Sydney in May.

In an effort to get members to accept the job losses, the MUA has demanded that the EA include increases in pay and overtime. Patrick claims this would amount to a 53 percent increase in labour costs. The union proposes 35 hours' pay for working 32 hours a week, penalty rate increases to 3.5 times the standard rate on weekends and the end of casual employment.

Tugboat engineers hold more strikes

Tugboat engineers at Port Botany in Sydney and Fremantle and Kwinana in Perth stopped work for 48 hours on Monday in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement (EA). Their action follows strikes at ports in Newcastle, Sydney and Geelong on January 12 and at Brisbane and Melbourne on January 13. The previous agreement expired on December 31.

The dispute between the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers and operator Svitser Australia is over the company's attempts to bring engineers into the same agreement as deckhands and tugboat skippers, who are represented by the Australian Maritime Officers Union and the Maritime Union of Australia. These unions have accepted the company's proposal for a four-year combined EA.

The tugboat engineers are concerned that hard-won conditions and entitlements specific to their duties and qualifications will be traded away by the other unions. They want to remain in a separate agreement. Svitzer's tugboat workers will vote on the proposed EA this week. The engineers' union has recommended that its members reject the agreement.

Lockout continues at Dulux Queensland plant

More than 100 workers at the Brisbane plant of paint manufacturer Dulux have been locked out without pay since January 12 after they voted for strike action following the company's refusal to remove a cap on redundancy entitlements in a proposed enterprise agreement. Dulux installed temporary fencing outside the factory, which is located in the suburb of Rocklea, in an attempt to stop workers forming a picket line.

The United Voice trade union and Dulux have been negotiating a new enterprise agreement for several months. The company offered 3 percent annual pay increases and "no adverse changes to conditions" but workers want the 20-year service pay-out cap on redundancy removed. Most workers have been at the plant for more than 20 years.

Dulux is opening a new factory in Melbourne in 2017 and plans to axe at least 40 jobs at Rocklea. United Voice has offered no opposition to the actual job destruction. It has not mobilised other workers in support of the locked-out members, just appealed for donations to make up for their lost pay.

New Zealand aviation security workers threaten to strike

After twice rejecting the government's proposed collective agreement, Aviation Security Service workers have threatened to strike if management does not soon resume negotiations.

The trade unions covering the workers, the Public Service Association, the ETU (a merger of the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union and the Service and Food Workers Union) and the National Union of Public Employees, called off strike action planned for December. They claimed it would cause "massive delays for the public during the holiday season."

A union spokesman said workers want a "modest" pay increase and retention of current conditions. The government wants to cut some entitlements, which would mean a pay cut of \$2,100 a year. Workers also complained that their workload has increased by 10 to 15 percent without any increase in resources.



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