

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

10 December 2011

China: Electronics workers on strike

Over 200 striking employees at the Hi-P International electronics factory in east Shanghai's Jinqiao industrial zone have vowed to continue picketing the plant until they are offered improved compensation when the factory relocates to the outskirts of the city in March. Over a dozen pickets have been arrested for obstruction since the strike began on November 30. About 800 of the 4,100 employees at the Singapore-owned factory have rejected two months' salary relocation compensation.

The company wants existing workers to move with the factory but as one of the strikers explained, "We work long shifts, sometimes over 20 hours. Even with a company shuttle bus, the new factory will mean an hour and a half's travelling every day, so we won't have any time left to rest. Most of us have been working at this factory for many years, so we should be properly compensated if they want to break our contracts," she said.

Hi-P International strikers said on Wednesday they would consider accepting the company's latest offer of an additional one hour's pay per day to those who spend 1.5 hours commuting.

India: Auto parts workers end strike

A three-day strike by 500 trainees at Caparo Engineering's Sriperumbudur auto component plant in Tamil Nadu ended on Sunday after management agreed to give employees permanent status.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions officials reported that management agreed to transfer 110 workers to permanent status immediately and the remainder during an undisclosed period. Monthly salaries will be increased from 7,200 rupees to 10,200 rupees (\$US225). Recognition of the Caparo union, however, was not resolved.

The UK-based Caparo Engineering established the Sriperumbudur plant at the Sipcot Industrial Estate in 2007. The factory, which produces stampings, aluminum die-castings and forgings for Nissan and Ford, has 800 workers with about 300 employed on contract.

Tamil Nadu textile workers strike

Packing workers at textile plants in Erode district, northern Tamil Nadu struck for 24 hours on December 2 to demand a 35 percent pay rise. Erode has 7,000 textile and garment factories that account for 62 percent of India's textile trade.

The textile packing workers had rejected a 26 percent increase from employers and said they would decide on further action after negotiations before the end of the month.

Andhra Pradesh sugar workers on strike

Over 300 contract workers at the Chodavaram cooperative sugar mill in Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh have been on strike

since November 21 to demand a wage rise and 65 days' bonus. Negotiations with the workers' union are ongoing. The mill processes over 540,000 tonnes of cane each season. According to cooperative management, last year's 53 million rupees' profit went to the farmers.

Korean security guards protest wage cut

Up to 750 security guards at four US army bases in South Korea are picketing to protest against a new contract. Former employees of Joeun Systems, which was contracted to provide security at the bases since 2006, have refused to sign contracts with their new employer, the British firm G4S. Workers claim the contracts slash wages by nearly \$US400 a month and increase weekly working hours from 40 to 60. G4S also plans to terminate about 120 guard jobs.

A spokesman for the guards claimed that G4S won the contract by bidding 500 million won (\$US463,000), less than Joeun Systems paid when it first signed the contract five years ago. "They won the bid with such a ridiculous price, and they're passing the entire burden to the security guards," the spokesman said.

G4S has threatened to hire new employees if the guards continue to refuse to sign the new contracts.

Western Australian port workers step up strike action

Following a 48-hour walkout on December 1, 23 traffic controllers and pilot boat crew at the Port of Fremantle in Western Australia scheduled a four-day stoppage beginning today.

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members want 6 percent annual pay increases over three years but Fremantle Ports has only offered 4.75 percent annual increases. An MUA negotiator claimed union members were more concerned about their rosters and were willing to defer the wage issue if an agreement could be made over shifts. The port workers oppose current 12-hour shift arrangements in which they typically work six days on and two days off.

Fremantle is Western Australia's major general cargo port, handling almost all of the state's container trade. The state Liberal government has called on the Gillard federal government to use Fair Work Australia to terminate industrial action on the grounds that it is damaging the state economy.

Queensland government building workers stop work

More than 500 Queensland government building tradesmen walked off the job for several hours on December 1, attending meetings to oppose the state government's 2.5 percent pay rise offer. Annual inflation is currently 3.6 percent in the state capital Brisbane, and higher in Central Queensland. Unions representing the building tradesmen want annual increases equal to, or above inflation.

According to the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) and the Electrical Trades Union, members employed by QBuild and the Transport and Main Roads department receive less than \$30 an hour compared to \$50 per hour paid to tradesmen in the mining sector. The state government has offered 3 percent annual increases in return for productivity gains.

Queensland brewery workers down tools

Around 100 employees at Lion Nathan's XXXX Brewery in Brisbane downed tools for an hour during two shifts on Thursday to oppose company plans to add a "good behaviour" clause for determining individual bonus entitlements in a new work agreement. A United Voice union official said management had refused to define "good behaviour."

The union wants to maintain the existing system, where bonuses are paid equally across-the-board. Brewery workers have endorsed a range of industrial action, including 48-hour stoppages.

Spotless cleaners launch industrial campaign

About 50 Spotless cleaners at the Sunshine Plaza on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland walked off the job for one hour on December 1 to protest low wages. Spotless cleaners in Queensland have voted overwhelmingly for industrial action, with further protests planned later this month. They are paid just \$16.57 an hour. According to the United Voice (UV) union, the company has refused to negotiate for a year.

Spotless cleaners at 11 shopping centres in Victoria have also voted overwhelmingly to take protected strike action over low pay—their minimum wage is \$15.51 per hour. UV has demanded a 33 percent pay increase for all cleaners.

On December 1, Spotless stood down three protesting cleaners at Centrepoint in Sydney. The cleaners were wearing union tee-shirts in support of better wages and job security. Several protesting cleaners were transferred to other sites. The action at Centrepoint is part of UV's long-running Clean Start campaign to unionise Australia's low-paid contract cleaning sector.

Xstrata mine workers in New South Wales strike

Miners at Xstrata's Ulan Coal Mines complex in western New South Wales walked off the job for 24 hours on December 3 after learning that several electrical staff had been discharged. The sudden walkout by CFMEU members was because there were not enough electricians working to safely run the mine, which violated basic compliance standards. Workers said they were also angry over various roster changes at Ulan.

Xstrata claims that the strike was in breach of the Enterprise Agreement and Contract of Employment and illegal under the Fair Work Act. The Ulan complex of underground and open cut mines operates 24/7, employing over 900 people, including ancillary contractors.

Victorian civilian defence workers walk out

Civilian Defence Department staff across Victoria walked off the job for up to eight hours on December 7 over stalled pay negotiations. Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members rallied outside Victoria Barracks in Melbourne. Union members in other Australian states are maintaining work bans. This is the third stoppage this year by civilian Defence staff over the issue.

The Gillard government has imposed a 3 percent wage rise cap. Any

increases above that will only be granted if staff agree to workplace savings. The CPSU, which covers most of the 13,000 civilian defence employees, wants annual pay increases above 4 percent over three years.

Negotiations for a new agreement have been underway since March. While Defence Department management is expected to present another pay offer next week it will not exceed the government's 3 percent ceiling.

Victorian community services workers protest

About 60 Victorian Department of Human Service (DHS) employees, including child protection, youth justice, housing, health and disability workers, rallied outside DHS offices in Bendigo, central Victoria, on December 3. The protest was over the state government's current pay and conditions offer.

Annual wage rises for state government employees have been capped at 2.5 percent. Any higher increase must be paid for with productivity improvements. CPSU officials addressed the rally and called for higher wages in line with the 4.5 percent annual increases for Victoria Police officers.

Last month, the CPSU agreed to government demands that child protection workers lift bans over low staffing levels. The bans reduced the number of child abuse cases handled by each officer by up to 50 percent.

Fair Work Australia orders Christmas Island miners to end strike

Fair Work Australia (FWA) intervened last week on behalf of Phosphate Resources to demand 180 Christmas Island miners end all strike action until January 3. FWA gave no official reason for its ruling but Phosphate Resources management has been calling on the Gillard government to place the dispute in compulsory arbitration since the walkout began.

Management claimed that the strike was damaging Christmas Island's economy and could force the 100-year-old phosphate mine to close. The Indian Ocean island is north-west of Western Australia and home to one of Australia's largest immigration detention centres.

Christmas Island Workers Union (CIWU) members had been on strike since November 2 for a 20 percent annual pay rise to give them parity with mine workers in Western Australia's Pilbara region. They have also demanded an increase in the annual district allowance to \$9,879 because of dramatic rises in the cost of living, in particular skyrocketing rents.

Phosphate Resources has only offered 7.5 percent annual pay increases over three years. CIWU acting general secretary Gordon Thomson said the union would abide by the FWA ruling.

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