

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

9 January 2016

Cambodian holiday resort workers protest

Sixty-five workers from the Victoria Angkor Resort and Spa in Siem Reap in Cambodia's northwest demonstrated outside the facility on December 29 and 30 to demand reinstatement of colleagues fired in September and October. The 17 workers were fired after being elected into leadership positions in their newly formed union.

The protest followed several meetings between the Cambodian Tourism and Service Workers' Federation (CTSWF) and the resort owners, which failed to resolve workers' grievances. As well as the reinstatement of the sacked union leaders, the resort employees want anti-union discrimination to end and for the resort's general manager to be dismissed.

Police attack tour bus drivers in Phnom Penh

Police destroyed banners and confiscated a loudspeaker on the second day of demonstrations by 40 sacked drivers outside the Capitol Tours bus company headquarters in Phnom Penh on December 31.

Five drivers were fired in July after workers attempted to form a union. Drivers walked out on strike after the company ignored a court ruling ordering their reinstatement. In November, 35 more drivers were fired over continued attempts to establish a union.

While a recent court ruling has ordered the reinstatement of three drivers, the workers have continued their protests outside City Hall to demand assistance from local government authorities.

China: Shenzhen taxi drivers strike

At least 90 percent of the 16,000 taxis in Shenzhen, on China's south-eastern border with Hong Kong, were off the road on Monday after drivers protested against low wages and competition from Uber and other app-powered car-hire services.

Workers' main grievances are the low pay of waged drivers and high rental costs for individual contract drivers. Fifty percent of taxis are owned by eight large firms which rent out vehicles. The protest follows strikes by taxi drivers in Chengdu, Changchun, Jinan, Nanjing and Shenyang over the same issues.

The protesting drivers complained that they work 12 hours every day but only receive 4,000 yuan (\$US613) a month, from which they have to pay rental fees and other running expenses.

Shenzhen mobile phone assembly workers demand unpaid wages

Hundreds of former workers at a Shenzhen mobile phone factory

demonstrated outside a local government building on Tuesday to demand unpaid wages, after their factory suddenly closed last month. The Shenzhen Zhongtian Xin Electronics assembly plant shut down on December 25 with local government approval leaving over 2,000 workers unemployed.

Local authorities told workers that they would arrange for labour officials to deal with workers' severance packages. According to the financial media, the company has been delaying salary payments since 2014.

Guangdong's Pearl River Delta, which is China's manufacturing powerhouse, has seen a wave of factory closures in the past two years. Over 70 enterprises closed their doors in the area last year, with mobile phone contractors among the worst hit by the global economic slowdown.

India: Punjab forestry workers end strike

Around 60 Forest Department workers in Bathinda, Punjab ended a five-day strike on January 2, after being assured by management that their demands would be forwarded to the state government. A Forest Department Field Workers Union member said employees wanted labourers who had worked for 240 days in the last year to be made permanent, a 12,000-rupee (\$US180) monthly minimum wage, payment of outstanding 2014–15 salaries and the provision of uniforms and other work equipment.

Punjab government hospital nurses protest

Contract nurses and ancillary staff at the Government Medical College in Bathinda walked off the job for two hours on January 2 to demand job permanency. There are only 35 permanent staff at the facility with 625 contract workers who have been employed for over six years. The health workers said they would continue their daily protest until January 18, when they have a meeting with the Punjab chief minister.

According to the Nursing and Ancillary Contractual Staff Union, the contract employees are only paid between 7,500 and 12,200 rupees a month with a 1,000-rupee annual increment. Regular staffers draw a monthly salary of over 50,000 rupees (\$US751). The government hospital workers have threatened to strike indefinitely if the government continues to ignore their demands.

Bangladeshi university teachers on strike

Chittagong University Teachers' Association (CUTA) members walked out for a week on January 3 as part of a nationwide campaign by Bangladeshi university teachers to demand higher

wages. The Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association (FBUTA), which represents teachers at all 37 public universities, has threatened to call an indefinite strike on January 11 over the issue.

The CUTA and FBUTA are demanding a new pay structure, which they said was not considered in the 8th national pay scale. The latest action follows various protests since the proposed national pay scale was announced in May.

Bangladeshi tea estate workers continue protests

Workers from over 150 tea gardens stopped work for two hours and held demonstrations at estates in the Sylhet division of Bangladesh on Monday to demand the government scrap plans for a special 207-hectare economic zone on agricultural land. The land is currently cultivated by tea workers' families to provide food and supplement their meagre incomes. The government wants to use the land for five special economic zones to attract foreign and domestic investors.

The latest action follows a week-long strike last month by thousands of plantation workers in the Moulvibazar and Habiganj districts over the issue. The Bangladesh Tea Labour Union at that time threatened to extend strike action to all 164 tea gardens nationally if the government did not withdraw its plan by December 28. Tea estate workers across Sylhet are scheduled to hold a large protest rally today.

Pakistan: Lahore government teachers oppose privatisation

Government school teachers demonstrated in Lahore on December 30 to oppose the privatisation of schools in Punjab province. The government has begun handing over management of public schools to the Punjab Education Foundation, a so-called public-private partnership with non-government organisations (NGO).

The Punjab Teachers' Union (PTU) said that 5,000 schools have already been handed over to NGOs and 300 teachers fired in the Sargodha district. The new management has hired teachers on monthly wages as low as 5,000 rupees (\$US47.67). Teachers fear that further privatisation will lead to more sackings, the replacement of teachers by low-waged recruitments and the destruction of public education.

The PTU has threatened to escalate protest action if the government fails to meet teachers by January 15.

Government hospital paramedics walk out in Lahore

Paramedics at the Services Hospital in Lahore boycotted duties for the day at the out-patients department on Tuesday and protested at the hospital's front gate. They were demanding four months' unpaid wages and the implementation of a new service structure previously agreed by the government. The Punjab Paramedical Staff Association said 60 employees from grades 1 to 4 were affected by delayed payments.

The paramedics are paid as low as 10,140 rupees (\$US96.68) per month in some cases. While the authorities promised to distribute unpaid wages within four days the paramedics warned that they would take more action if all their demands were not met.

Peshawar tobacco workers oppose sackings

Philip Morris cigarette workers demonstrated outside the press club in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, on January 2 to oppose the arbitrary sacking of 141 employees at the company's Swabi and Charsadda plants. The company had ignored a court injunction against the cost-cutting terminations.

Western Australian government to slash jobs at south Perth health services

The Western Australian Liberal government has confirmed that the equivalent of 1,163 jobs will be cut from Perth's South Metropolitan Health Service to reduce spending "to sustainable levels." The announcement follows strike action on December 2 by nurses and ancillary workers at the Royal Perth Hospital and Fremantle Hospital in protest against health cuts previously announced by Premier Colin Barnett.

In October the Western Australian government declared that the state's health system would face significant job cuts over the next eight months as the Health Department slashes costs in line with national funding cutbacks. The job destruction follows the closure of Fremantle's emergency department last year.

The Western Australian health minister said that at least half of the 1,160 jobs to be eliminated will be at the Royal Perth Hospital and nearly 300 from the recently opened Fiona Stanley Hospital.

Papua New Guinea power utility workers threaten action

PNG Power workers have threatened to take industrial action if management and the PNG Energy Workers Association do not finalise a still unresolved Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) by Friday. The threat is in response to the government's claim that the new EBA has been fully implemented.

Power workers from across the country told the union that they wanted all outstanding issues resolved immediately. These include pay remuneration for all lower level general staff, reinstatement of higher duty allowances, and payment of all leave entitlements.

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