

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

15 March 2014

## IBM workers in China on strike

More than 1,000 employees at IBM's International Systems Technology Company server-making factory in Shenzhen, Guangdong have been on strike since March 3 over compensation offered to workers when the Lenovo Group Ltd, which has bought the plant for \$US2.3 billion, takes over.

IBM has offered workers who want to terminate their employment "compensation" plus 6,000 yuan (US\$980). Those who want keep working at the plant would automatically become Lenovo employees but forgo the 6,000 yuan.

Workers have presented a letter of grievance to the factory's management, stating that IBM's offer violates Chinese law. They have demanded a compensation package based on average monthly salary payments and years-of-service multiplied by two, plus one month's salary. They also want restrictions to working hours according to Chinese law, periodic occupational health and safety checks and extra compensation to female workers who are pregnant or nursing.

IBM has begun sacking the protesting workers in an attempt to end the strike. According to the *Southern Metropolis Daily*, at least 19 employees were fired on Monday for disobeying company orders, absence without leave, and gathering together during work hours.

## South Korean doctors walk out

Over 7,000 Korean Medical Association (KMA) members at government hospitals and clinics walked out on March 10 in protest against the Park Geun-hye government's plans to introduce telemedicine and allow

hospitals to operate for-profit subsidiaries. About 30 percent of the country's town hospitals and clinics—a total of 8,300—had to suspend operations during the strike. Emergency room and intensive care centre staff were not involved in the one-day stoppage.

The Korean government issued a work resumption order to hospitals that closed during the strike. Doctors who disobeyed the order could face work suspensions of up to 15 days. Prosecutors and police also vowed to lay criminal charges or suspend striking doctors' licenses.

The KMA, which has over 100,000 members, including 30,000 at government hospitals, has given notice that a six-day national strike will commence on March 24. Until then, doctors are involved in work-to-rule action. This includes treating each patient for only 15 minutes and medical residents only working eight hours a day, 40 hours a week.

## India: Tamil Nadu stainless steel workers' strike in seventh week

Stainless steel workers in the Anupparalayam utensils manufacturing cluster in Tamil Nadu have been on strike since January 28 for a new wage accord. The last agreement expired in December. Workers want a 65 percent wage rise. Factory owners have increased their offer from 10 to 15 percent but workers said it was still not enough.

Striking copper and brass workers in the Anupparalayam cluster have accepted their employers' 33.5 percent pay rise offer but said that they would remain on strike in support of the steel workers. The next round of talks is scheduled for March 19.

## **Gujarat heavy industry manufacturing workers on strike**

Close to 1,000 workers at the heavy engineering unit of the multi-national company Larsen & Toubro (L&T) in Hazira, in India's south-western state of Gujarat, have been on strike for nearly three months for higher wages. Workers want wages on par with colleagues at T&J's unit in Powai, Maharashtra.

An L&T Kamdar Union official said the company had offered a 6,750-rupee increase to workers in Powai, but that Hazira employees were only offered a 4,500-rupee rise. While the average monthly salary at Powai is 45,000 rupees, Hazira employees only receive 25,000 rupees (\$US410). L&T told media it will not increase its offer to the Hazira workers and, in a veiled threat to strikers, said it had the option of hiring replacement workers to maintain production.

## **Northern Territory public school teachers strike**

More than 1,500 teachers at 24 remote area schools in the Northern Territory held a full-day stoppage on March 7 in a long-running dispute with the territory's Liberal Country government for a new enterprise bargaining agreement. The action followed a Fair Work Commission directive in December ordering the Australian Education Union (AEU) to lift bans and suspend all industrial action until March 3.

The AEU began limited industrial action in November after teachers rejected 3 percent annual pay increases over four years. Northern Territory's current inflation rate is 3.9 percent. Teachers also demanded job protection clauses in any new agreement.

The territory government plans to axe at least 420 teaching positions within three years, down from the current 2,500, and eliminate about 1,000 contract teaching and ancillary positions from the present 4,000 positions.

## **Western Australian education workers to strike**

Thousands of public school teachers and education

support workers in Western Australia are set to strike for 24 hours on April 1 over state government cuts to jobs and education funding. The strike action was called by the State School Teachers Union, United Voice and the Community and Public Sector Union and is supported by parents' organisation Save Our Schools.

The Barnett Liberal government announced last August that it would cut the education budget by \$180 million and axe 500 jobs, including 350 education assistant jobs and 150 administrative and clerical positions.

The planned walkout is the first since last September when almost 20,000 teachers and education support workers, parents and students rallied in Perth, the Western Australian capital, and in regional cities and towns across the state in opposition to the cuts.

The unions' April 1 walkout is not aimed at defending the jobs—the cuts, in fact, have already begun—but to divert the mounting anger of teachers and education workers into harmless appeals to the government.

## **University of Queensland staff strike**

Members of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), representing over 900 of the 7,500 full-time staff at the University of Queensland (UQ) walked off the job for 24 hours on March 11 in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement. The walkout follows a strike ballot last September.

Staff are demanding an enterprise agreement that defends conditions and ends the casualisation of full-time positions. According to the NTEU, full-time teaching staff numbers have plunged since 2012, while students have increased by 8,000, or 20 percent, over the past five years. Around 50 percent of undergraduate teaching is now performed by casuals paid on an hourly basis.

UQ management attempted to reduce involvement in the walkout and drag out negotiations with the union by agreeing to pay a 2.5 percent salary increase from 1 January 2014, outside of any scheduled pay rise.



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