

Workers Struggles: Asia and the Pacific

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Asia

Nationwide protest in Pakistan against privatisation

Workers at the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) across Pakistan protested on December 29 against the government's plan to privatise the utility authority in response to World Bank demands.

In Sindh province workers went on strike for the day. Hyderabad Electric Supply Company (Hesco) employees held protest meetings at different locations in Hyderabad, including at the Hesco headquarters. Other demonstrations and rallies took place across the province in Mirpurkhas, Khairpur, Dadu, Badin and Shikarpur.

WAPDA workers in Quetta, Balochistan province in western Pakistan, rallied against privatisation and to condemn layoffs. Carrying placards and chanting anti-privatisation slogans, they assembled in front of the local press club. They also demanded salary increases to compensate for price hikes and called for the restoration of pensions. Faisalabad Electric Supply Company (Fesco) employees went on strike in Gojra, Pirmahal and Kamalia in the Toba Tek Singh district.

Indian bank workers agitate over non-payment of salaries

Nearly 20,000 workers from 2,000 Primary Agricultural Co-operative Banks (PACB) in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu protested in several cities on December 24. They are objecting to the non-payment of wages for six to eight months.

In Tallakulam workers demonstrated outside the Office of Joint Registrar of Cooperatives while hundreds of workers rallied in Salem, Erode Palayamkottai and Theni.

Workers rejected government claims that salary

payments were delayed because the banks had suffered losses after providing drought relief to farmers. They demanded government assistance to cover wages. They also called on the government to set up a commission with worker representation to discuss the revision of wages rates.

Bank employees in Andhra Pradesh protest closure

Workers at the District Cooperative Central Bank (DCCB) in Adilabad in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh protested on December 20 over government moves to close the bank. They are critical of the authority's failure to invest surplus funds from governmental and quasi-governmental institutions in DCCBs.

Workers also demanded the processing of promotions and improvements in the payment of various allowances.

Indian sanitation strike over police assault

Sanitation workers in Pathanamthitta, Kerala, held a lightning strike at midday on December 24. They were protesting a police assault on a Sabarimala Sanitation Society (SSS) worker. The worker, Kanthasami, was physically attacked early one morning while removing waste from the upper reaches of the Chelikkuzhi.

The protesters demanded action against the police involved. They ended the strike after an assurance from the Police Special Officer and the Duty Magistrate that the complaint would be dealt with.

New Zealand and the Pacific

Air New Zealand workers vote for second strike

Auckland-based Air New Zealand ground staff voted to strike in the New Year after rejecting a two-tier pay offer by the airline. The strike proposal, voted on just before Christmas, was approved by a 93 percent margin. More than 500 ground staff went on strike on October 15 over the same issue.

A Service and Food Workers Union spokesperson said union members were angry over a divisive pay

arrangement the airline has been trying to impose over the last six months. The company wants union members to forfeit back-pay entitlements and accept delays in pay increases already offered to other airline workers.

Strike breakers used in NZ printing dispute

Australian-owned printing company PMP Print has been accused of using contract labour during an industrial dispute in the week before Christmas. Two workers from body-hire company Drake Personnel were reportedly brought into the Christchurch printing plant while employees were on a 24-hour strike over pay. The Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU) also complained that the management refused its officials right of entry during the dispute.

The EPMU has filed a complaint with the Employment Relations Authority accusing the company of breaching the Employment Relations Act (ERA). PMP has filed a counter suit alleging “bad faith” by the union during recent pay talks. An earlier attempt by the company to have the matter taken to compulsory facilitation—a new provision in the ERA—failed.

Teachers set deadline for strike

The Vanuatu Teachers Union (VTU) has given the government until January 25 to implement an agreement made with the education authorities for improved wages and working conditions. If the deadline is not met, teachers will take industrial action on February 7.

The teachers want a 30-percent cost-of-living pay increase and improved housing and remote allowances. They have not had a general pay increase since 1994. They are also demanding changes to regulations that allow the suspension of teachers without pay. Other public servants are entitled to half pay while on suspension.

The VTU is also calling on the government to address permanency issues. Currently teachers are being made to work a one-year probationary period. The Employment Act, however, stipulates a period of only six months. There are instances of teachers working in a position for up to 10 years without being made permanent.

VTU officials hoping to avert the strike are seeking an urgent meeting with the Ministry of Education before the January deadline.



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