

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia & the Pacific

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Asia

Indian union calls off Toyota strike

Toyota Kirloskar Motor Workers Union officials called off an 18-day strike at Toyota's Bidadi plant near Bangalore in Karnataka, India, on January 23. The union is affiliated to the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

The decision to end the strike came two days after the state government invoked the Essential Services Act and arrested 1,300 employees who had gone to the state labour secretary's office in Bangalore to seek an appointment to discuss their demands. Those arrested were later released.

According to a Toyota spokesman, union leaders agreed to sign a declaration of good conduct. He confirmed that workers who did not sign the declaration would not be allowed back into the plant.

Nearly 1,550 of the 2,350-strong workforce walked out on January 6, opposing the dismissal of three trade union leaders, and the company imposed a lockout. Toyota has refused to reinstate the three union officials and 127 other union activists who were in the forefront of the strike.

Indian rail workers strike for conditions

East Coast Railway Workers Union members in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, held a one-day sit-in strike on January 24 for a list of demands, including immediate improvements in safety, additional loco maintenance and inspection staff, and the release of 40 technicians from menial tasks to work on loco maintenance. They also want the right to take casual leave and the opening of the work's canteen for morning and afternoon tea breaks. A delegation of strikers presented their demands to a senior divisional electrical engineer.

In a separate dispute, some 64 railway employees at Bangalore railway station in Karnataka held a sit-in strike on January 24 in protest against the station manager removing some posters and banners outlining workers' grievances.

Punjab university teachers strike

Teachers at government-aided private university colleges in Punjab began two-hour daily work stoppages on January 21 as initial action in a campaign for improved conditions. Teachers at Malwa, Bondi and Samral colleges are involved. They want a pension and gratuity scheme, inclusion of a 50 percent dearness allowance in basic pay and the release of a 95 percent aid grant. The protesters criticised the government's "callous" attitude to their demands.

Professor Baldeep Singh told the press that a committee established in April 2005 to investigate the issues had not conceded any of the teachers' demands. He warned that teachers could intensify the campaign if their demands were not addressed.

In a separate dispute, the Uttar Pradesh Teachers Employees Union called a three-day strike on January 23 over the inclusion of 50 percent of the dearness allowance in the basic salary and other demands. Secondary school class IV teachers and over 1.5 million up-state local government workers also joined the strike, which affected several state government departments, including education, agriculture, health, animal husbandry, transport and social welfare.

Hong Kong teachers protest over working hours

About 10,000 teachers and supporters took to the streets in Hong Kong on January 22 demanding a reduction in working hours following two suicides within the profession. Protesters also called on the government to slow its education system "reform," which has increased work levels and stress.

The Professional Teachers Union, however, has

limited its action to protests and a warning that teachers will march again if Hong Kong's Chief Executive Donald Tsang does nothing to address the issues.

Filipino nursing graduates march in protest

Some 145 nursing students marched to the Hall of Justice in the Philippines' city of Iloilo on January 23 and filed a legal case against the Professional Regulatory Commission (PRC). The PRC is refusing to release the exam results of about 300 nursing graduates from West Negros College in Bacolod city. All other nursing graduates across the country received their results in mid-December 2005.

Most of the affected nursing students had previously been qualified doctors but planned to seek overseas employment as nurses. Overseas nurses receive higher wages than doctors in the Philippines, who earn up to 18,000 pesos (\$US321). Nurses abroad can earn up to 250,000 pesos. In 2004, nearly 4,000 doctors passed the nursing board exam and took up employment outside the country, forcing many hospitals to close or reduce operations.

The PRC had earlier refused to give a reason for not releasing the exam results but later said it was due to administrative overload.

Australia and the Pacific

Workers strike at Australian winery

Over 50 workers at Hardy Wines near Mildura in Victoria went on strike on January 24 over a break down in negotiations for a new work agreement. The company has refused to increase a seasonal loading paid to wine workers. In June 2003, wine industry workers were awarded a 25 percent loading. Hardy Wines, however, pays only 20 percent to its casual employees and has ruled out any increase.

The company is also refusing to include a clause in the new work agreement allowing employees access to arbitration if dismissed. It has also rejected granting a higher rate of accrual for long-service leave.

Worsley workers strike over unsafe conditions

About 500 workers at the Worsley Alumina refinery in Western Australia went on strike on January 23. They walked out after learning that 28 employees had been exposed to caustic dust over the weekend.

They were still on strike two days later, after union delegates inspected the site and declared it unsafe. A union spokesman ruled out a return to work until the safety issue was addressed and said safety had to

improve by 200 percent.

PNG nurses strike over management appointments

On January 20, 127 nurses for Wewak Boram Hospital in the East Sepik district of Papua New Guinea struck over the Health Department's unexplained and suspicious displacement of some hospital executives and the appointment of close relatives of hospital board members in their place.

Moses Kapus, a representative of the East Sepik Nurses Association, said the nurses would remain on strike until the health minister and health secretary visited Wewak, addressed the nurses, suspended hospital management and the board, and investigated the issue.



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