

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

15 July 2006

Asia

Bangladesh teachers continue indefinite strike

An indefinite strike by around 500,000 teachers from 30,000 private high schools, colleges and madrasas (Islamic schools) across the country entered its seventh day on July 13. The teachers are demanding a 100 percent basic salary rise. They also want an increase in house rent allowance, full medical and festival allowances and other benefits in line with UNESCO and International Labor Organisation (ILO) recommendations.

High school teachers demonstrated in the capital Dhaka on July 12. After rallying at the Central Shaheed Minar they marched to Shikkha Bhaban. In Lalmonirhat teachers burnt effigies of Finance Minister Saifur Rahman and State Minister for Education A.N.M. Ehsanul Hoque.

The Teachers-Employees United Front (TEUF), an alliance of 11 associations of non-government teachers and employees, called for equal fringe and other benefits for private school employees in line with their government counterparts.

Non-government technical college teachers, under the banner of Bangladesh Karigari College Shikkhak Samity, also rallied at Muktagon in Dhaka on July 12. They want the government to meet a 12-point log of claims, including the introduction of a separate pay scale and a reduction of student fees.

Indian bank workers strike

Around 32,000 employees of the Central Bank of India held an all-India strike on July 11 over working conditions and union rights. The strike was total in Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Bhopal, Jaipur, Chandigarh, Patna, Jamshedpur, Goa, Pune, Nagpur, Cuttack, Imphal and Sikkim. Clearing operations could not be transacted in most centres and almost all bank branches were affected.

Workers claim that terminal and retirement staff benefits are not being sanctioned and hundreds of vacancies remain unfilled. They also allege that union leaders are being arbitrarily transferred to cripple the functioning of union branches.

The strike includes members of the All India Central Bank Employees' Federation, All India Central Bank Employees' Congress, All India Central Bank Officers' Association, Rashtriya Central Bank Officers' Congress and Central Bank Employees Federation of India.

Indian diary workers protest salary delays

Parsi Dairy Farm employees picketed the company's head office at Marine Lines in Mumbai on July 10, protesting the late payment of salaries and the non-payment of bonuses for the past two years.

One picket complained: "Our salaries are two or three weeks late." Workers said that protests would be held daily until the issues were

addressed. Parsi Dairy Farm was established in 1916 by Ardeshan Nariman and currently employs over 2,500 people.

Transport workers strike for pay increase

Transport workers in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh went on strike for 24 hours on July 11 to demand a wage increase. The strike crippled public transport in cities such as Lucknow, Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Bareilly, Ghaziabad, Meerut, Moradabad, Kanpur and Agra.

Bus stands in Kaiserbagh and Charbagh in Lucknow were deserted as hundreds of thousands of commuters searched for alternative means of transport. The action was called by the Roadways Employees' Union.

Indian sanitary employees walk out

Nearly 185 sanitary workers at around 90 privately-run Nirmala public toilets managed by Integriti India in Bangalore, Karnataka, went on indefinite strike on July 11. They are demanding the payment of salaries due for the last three months.

The company claims it has been unable to pay wages because the state government has not reimbursed it for water bills paid to the municipal council. The council, however, claims that the company has not paid water or electricity bills.

In a separate dispute, temporary sanitary workers at Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu demonstrated outside the municipal building on July 5 demanding the regular employment status. Some have worked for the council for 13 years on a temporary basis.

Other demands include, the provision of raincoats every three years and an annual issue of work shoes. The workers also want a selection-grade salary for those with up to 10 year's service and a special grade for 10 years and over.

Indian mine workers protest contract system

About 100 mine workers in Raichur, Karnataka marched on the deputy commissioner's office and held a sit-down protest outside the premises on July 10. They were demonstrating against the contract labor system adopted by the Hutti Gold Mines Company Limited at its Hirabuddinni and Uti opencast mines in Raichur district.

They want the contract system abolished and an end to their being employed as daily-wage workers.

Hyundai workers continue strike action

Hyundai Motor workers throughout South Korea are continuing industrial action for a 9.1 percent wage rise and an increase in bonus payments. Management is offering a 65,000 won (\$US68.25) monthly wage increase. The union wants 125,000 won.

On July 13, production, sales and maintenance department employees went on strike for six hours and are threatening an all-out strike. Workers in the manufacturing division held two eight-hour rolling strikes and have now extended the length of the stoppages. A

total strike in Hyundai's sales area has delayed the delivery of thousands of cars. The company claims that the strike has stopped the production of 46,954 cars totalling 645.9 billion won.

Philippines furniture workers' union withdraws strike notice

The Associated Labor Union-Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (ALU-TLCP) representing 90 workers at furniture manufacturer Cebu Ratten Corporation has withdrawn a strike notice filed in April. The union wants negotiations on a new collective bargaining agreement transferred from the National Conciliation and Mediation Board to the Labor Secretary's office.

The strike notice was filed after three months of negotiations with company reached a deadlock. The workers want a pay 125-peso (\$US2.37) daily pay increase, plus retirement pay and other benefits.

Australia and the Pacific

Australian car part workers strike over sackings

Auto parts workers at Huon Corporation's three plants in Victoria began indefinite strike action on July 12. The plants are Empire Rubber in Bendigo, FRN in Frankston and Mills Elastomers in Dandenong.

The 570 workers, members of the National Union of Workers, walked out when 122 employees were made redundant and may not be paid entitlements. Some of those laid off have more than 25 years service. Huon is currently in the hands of administrators SimsPartners and owes workers \$30 million in entitlements.

Huon managing director John Schulz last month would only say that the issue of entitlements would be "diligently addressed". According to the union, however, previous owners Nylex Ltd stripped \$10 million in assets which could have been used to partly pay entitlements.

The Huon Corporation purchased the three plants from Nylex Ltd last December but is currently taking legal action against the company, claiming it misrepresented earnings during sale negotiations. Because Huon has been put in administration, rather than being declared bankrupt, redundant workers are not entitled to access the federal government's General Employee Entitlements and Redundancy Scheme.

Canberra bus drivers return to work

About 500 bus drivers and other staff employed by ACTION buses in Australia's capital Canberra stopped work for three hours on July 7 to meet over job security and cuts to bus services.

They pledged to continue opposition to Australian Capital Territory (ACT) government plans to cut 8 percent from ACTION's \$7 million annual budget. The government resumed control of the bus service on July 1, following abolition of the ACTION Authority. A union spokesman said he would not rule out further industrial action, adding: "The response from the ground has been absolute outrage at these (government) proposals."

New Zealand postal workers in contract dispute

Postal Workers Federation (PWF) members have imposed bans over a contract dispute with NZ Post. Last week, workers refused to deliver items other than letters. The ban includes bills and commercial circulars.

The action is in response to a management memo claiming that the previous collective agreement had expired and workers were now on individual agreements. It stated they would have to join an alternative union to negotiate a pay rise or bargain individually. NZ Post responded to the ban by suspending some PWF members. This led to total shutdowns at delivery branches in Whangarei, Kaitaia, Dargaville, New Lynn, and Grey Lynn.

Earlier PWF members, including 850 mail deliverers, voted by a 90 percent majority to reject NZ Post's new collective agreement offer, which would see all workers employed after July 2000 paid 6 percent less than those employed before that date. Workers also opposed only being reimbursed one-way on trips when they forced to use private cars on NZ Post business.

Fiji gold miners' union backs down

Unions representing 124 retrenched workers from the Vatukoula Gold Mine have withdrawn strike threats after intervention by the Ministry of Labour manager Sainivalati Kuruadua. Instead, the Mine Workers Union of Fiji and the Vatukoula Mine Staff Association have lodged a notice with the Ministry of Labour for the dispute to be resolved under the Trade Dispute Act.

Emperor Gold Mines (EGM) stood down almost its entire 1,900-strong workforce last April and announced the reemployment of all but 300 employees over the following six-month period. Facing the possibility of a break down of Vatukoula township's economy, the Fiji government struck a deal with EGM and promised the unions that it ensure all workers were paid the average wage while stood down. The company also agreed to negotiate a redundancy package for the 300 workers.

Since then EGM has refused to meet the union and negotiate a retrenchment package and on July 3 issued termination notices to 99 miners and 24 administrative staff. The company offered three month's pay, plus two weeks for every year of service. The unions threatened to strike if EGM did not agree to six month's pay, plus two weeks for each year of service.

PNG teachers strike for second time over pay issues

On July 10, the Papua New Guinea Teachers Association (PNGTA) called on its 25,000 members for a national indefinite strike over the government renegeing on a memorandum of understanding (MOU) it signed with the union in May. The MOU promised to correct long-standing pay discrepancies.

Despite teachers' widespread misgivings about the MOU, which was negotiated behind closed doors, they were persuaded by the union and government to end an eight-day strike and return to work on May 19. Many teachers claimed they did not trust the union or the government and wanted to remain on strike until the outstanding money was paid. These misgivings were realised early in July when the treasury refused to allocate the 73 million kina (\$US23.5 million) additional funding needed to meet salary shortfalls accumulated since 2003.

The current strike has been declared illegal by the industrial registrar and the Public Service Conciliation and Public Service Tribunal. The Teaching Services Commission and the Education Department have issued a joint directive to all head teachers to keep schools open and report the names of any teacher not attending classes. The teachers have been threatened with termination if they do not comply. Nine teachers in the National Capital District (NCD) have already been sacked for their participation in the strike.

Meanwhile, teachers have gathered at the union's NCD office demanding the strike continue until the salary payments are made.



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