

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

23 February 2008

## **State workers in Thailand protest new classification**

On February 17, more than 3,000 state sector health workers across the country rallied outside the Public Health Ministry demanding withdrawal of policy changes that impact on promotions.

The health workers claim that recent changes categorising them as “general public servants” limit their career path, professional development and chances for improved pay and conditions.

The protesters want district public health chiefs, heads of clinics ranked as administrators and lower posts holding bachelor’s degrees to be classified as technical advisors. They have also called for the withdrawal of a decentralisation plan to transfer 22 public offices across a number of Thai provinces to local administrative organisations.

## **Indian contract health workers demand regularisation**

Contract health workers demonstrated on February 15 outside the City Corporation in Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu to demand regular employment for 2,635 temporary workers in government hospitals and medical college hospitals.

They also want time-scale based pay, the immediate payment of wage arrears and the awarding of special bonuses now denied to contract employees. The workers are members of the Tamilnadu Public Health Department Contract Laborers’ Association.

## **Indian teachers protest**

State teachers held a sit-down protest outside the Kadapa Municipal Corporation office in Andhra Pradesh on February 14. They are demanding promotions, the sanctioning of non-teaching posts, immediate payment of insurance premiums and the issuing of provident fund slips. They also want prompt payment of salaries on the first of every month. The

teachers are members of the State Teachers Union.

## **Sri Lankan voluntary teachers on hunger protest**

Voluntary teachers in Sri Lanka’s North Western Province began an indefinite sit-down hunger protest in front of the Ministry of Education this week. They wanted 520 voluntary teachers to be appointed as assistant teachers as from February 12, 2008. The teachers warned that if their demands are not met they will continue their protest.

## **Western Australian public servants vote for industrial action**

Over 2,000 state public servants attended a stop-work meeting on February 20 in Perth and rejected a state government pay rise offer. They voted to take industrial action within five days unless the offer is improved.

Community and Public Sector Union members want a 23 percent pay rise over three years and an increase in superannuation contributions of up to 13 percent based on length of service.

The state government has only offered an 11.5 percent pay rise over three years. The amount is in line with the demand of Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd for “wage restraint” in the so-called “fight against inflation”.

## **West Australian teachers strike for higher pay**

Public school teachers in Western Australia (WA) this week rejected the state government’s offer of a 13 percent pay rise over three years. The teachers are demanding 20 percent. A spokesperson for the State School Teachers Union of WA said teachers will strike on February 28 and rally in Perth’s Supreme Court Gardens.

A union spokesperson pointed to the critical teacher shortage and said that attempts by WA Education Minister Mark McGowan to recruit interstate teachers would be “futile if he can’t offer improved salaries and conditions”.

WA Department of Education and Training director general Sharyn O'Neill claimed that the government had made a good "multi-million dollar offer". The proposed increase, however, is barely above the current inflation rate of 3.5 percent. Inflation is expected to increase to at least 4.5 percent by the end of 2008.

### **Victorian teachers begin rolling stoppages for pay increase**

Public school teachers in the Australian state of Victoria will begin regional half-day stoppages on February 26 as part of a campaign for improved wages and conditions. The teachers want an annual 10 percent pay increase for three years but the state Labor government is only offering 3.25 percent per year with trade-offs for anything above this amount.

Despite the government's stance, the Australian Education Union (AEU) leadership at a mass meeting on February 14 did not propose escalating industrial action or advocate a united campaign with other education workers now involved in pay disputes.

Teachers employed in private Catholic schools, members of the Independent Education Union, are planning to strike on March 7 and demonstrate outside state parliament as part of their campaign for improved pay and conditions.

At the same time, school principals have begun a campaign of non-compliance for a 10 percent annual pay rise. Members of the Australian Principals Federation are refusing to attend government briefings and conferences or cooperate in the roll-out of the government's "Ultraset" computer system, which allows attendance, assessment, assignments, educational resources and feedback to be accessed by students, teachers and parents.

### **Firemen to protest over pay and conditions**

Fire fighters in Queensland are planning demonstrations in Brisbane and other major centres across the state on February 28. They are protesting against the government reneging on provisions in the existing enterprise bargaining agreement requiring it to boost wages if fire fighters improve their qualifications. Protracted negotiations have failed to resolve the issue.

A union spokesman said that base pay rates of fire fighters were significantly lower than other occupations that did not require the level of skills and qualifications or the life-threatening conditions facing firemen on a daily basis.

### **New Zealand early childhood contract dispute settled**

A contract dispute between early childhood teachers and the Dunedin Community Childcare Association was settled last week on the eve of teachers going on strike. More than 50 teachers had earlier decided to strike after the association refused to remain a party to the current collective agreement.

Subsequent talk between the employer and the NZ Educational Institute resolved the differences when the association agreed to remain in the Early Childhood Education Collective Agreement.

### **New Caledonia union to lay complaint against French government**

The New Caledonian Union for Exploited and Kanak Workers (USTKE) announced this week that it will lodge a complaint against the French government over recent police violence against 200 striking bus workers.

The complaint is in response to an incident on January 17 when strikers clashed with police who assaulted them during an occupation at the headquarters of Carsud, the bus company that provides services in the capital Nouméa and surrounding areas. The workers had stopped work and occupied the site over the dismissal of a colleague for alleged misconduct.

Over 200 police were sent to disperse the occupation and attacked workers with tear gas grenades, rubber bullets and batons. The USTKE claims many of their members were injured, receiving broken noses, broken ribs and several of them were beaten while in custody.

Up to 63 strikers were arrested with at least 12 held on remand. Most were charged with armed assault on police officers and criminal damage. Ten of the detainees remain in prison awaiting trial. Two weeks ago police surrounded the USTKE offices after leading union official Gerard Jodar refused to present himself for questioning over the clashes.



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