

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

5 July 2008

Asia

Bihar university workers continue indefinite strike

An indefinite strike which began on June 25 by more than 3,000 non-teaching staff at universities and colleges in the Indian state of Bihar is continuing to paralyse all academic and administrative work at the institutions.

It follows an indefinite strike by non-teaching staff at Patna University (PU) that entered its 20th day on June 25. The university administration is directing all PU employees who are not on strike to report to the vice-chancellor's residence for duty.

The strikers want salary and allowances on par with government staff, a merger of 50 percent of the Dearness Allowance with basic pay, and a scheme to ensure career promotions. The non-teaching workers are members of the Bihar State University Employees' Federation.

Indian child-care workers protest over salaries

Childcare (Anganwadi) workers in Chittoor in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh surrounded the state Collectorate on June 30 to protest the government's refusal to grant a wage rise and regular payment of monthly salaries. The workers are members of the Anganwadi and Helpers' Association.

In a separate dispute, casual workers at the State Housing Corporation in Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh demonstrated in the city on June 30 to demand regularisation of employment.

Indian administrative workers on hunger strike

Seven casual workers employed by the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) have been on hunger strike since June 27 outside the District Magistrate's office in Darjeeling.

The protestors are from Kalimpong, Kurseong and Mirik and want regularisation of employment for around 8,000 DGHC workers who continue to be employed on six-month renewable contracts despite years of service. The council workers are members of the Janamukti Asthayee Karmachari Sangathan.

Indian diamond workers demand pay rise

Hundreds of workers engaged in cutting and polishing diamonds in Surat, Gujarat demonstrated on July 2 for a 20 percent wage rise. The workers have not had a salary increase in the last 12 years.

Surat accounts for 60 percent of the world's polished diamond market while the overseas sales of gems and jewellery is India's second-largest export industry after computer software. Around 700,000 people are employed in the industry with another 2.5 million people indirectly associated with the trade.

Chinese construction workers protest for wages

Construction workers in Myanyang, Sichuan protested on June 29 to demand outstanding wages owed by a property developer.

The workers, who are migrants from other districts across China, claim they have not been paid for more than two years. Their plight was made more desperate by China's recent earthquakes that hit Mianyang very hard.

Japan tour guides rally for pensions and health cover

On June 30, around 50 tour guides from Hankyu Tour Support rallied outside the state-run Temma Social Insurance Agency in Osaka to demand enrolment in the health and pension fund.

The agency is refusing to enrol tourist guides claiming that they are part-time workers on short hours and therefore do not qualify. The workers allege that the agency is defying Japanese laws, which state that all employees must be enrolled regardless of their working hours. Representatives of the agency met with the protesters and said the company will review the case.

Australia and the Pacific

Truck drivers protest rising fuel prices

About 150 truck drivers staged a go-slow driving their rigs at between 60 to 80 kilometres an hour on the busy M3 freeway between the NSW Central Coast and Sydney on July 1. They were protesting against fuel prices that

have soared over the last three months to an average of \$1.85 a litre.

A Transport Workers Union spokesman warned that industrial action by the truckers could escalate in the coming weeks. "There is certainly a possibility of blockades," he said, and added, "If fuel gets to \$2 a litre, we think that's the tip-over point."

Independent driver Tony McNulty told the media this week that the fuel situation was the worst he had experienced in 22 years. "My hours are getting longer. I'm basically chasing my tail to pay the bills and the increased fuel costs," he said.

Teachers' maintain bans on new courses

Western Australian teachers are maintaining bans on the implementation of 30 new Year 11 courses. The State School Teachers Union last week rejected a call by the WA Industrial Relations Commission (WAIRC) that they lift the bans.

The Western Australian Minister for Education Mark McGowan ordered the Department of Education and Training to take the union to the WAIRC over the bans on planning and preparation for all courses to be introduced in 2009.

The union is now surveying members about extra workloads if course planning goes ahead and whether curriculum documents and teaching resources are ready for next year's Year 11 courses.

Industrial action continues at the Auckland airport

Another work-stoppage by food-court workers at Auckland International Airport occurred on June 28. The workers claim they have one of the worst employment contracts in New Zealand and began an industrial campaign three weeks ago demanding improved pay and working conditions.

A Unite Union spokesman described the current work contract as "medieval" and said the recent series of work stoppages and protests follow the company's refusal to shift its position in negotiations. Most of the workers received a 6 percent cut in pay this year when the company slashed standard shift hours from 40 to 37.5 hours per week including the hours of workers with years of service.

NZ Department of Labour contract settled

The New Zealand Public Service Association (PSA) called off industrial action by Department of Labor staff after reaching a settlement on collective agreement negotiations with the Department of Labour last week. The agreement covers 750 department staff who struck work three times in the last two weeks. A series of 14 two-

hour strikes were set to start on June 27.

The union wants PSA members to accept the settlement, claiming that it contains major improvements in the department's wages setting system to make it "fairer and more transparent" and a 4 percent across-the-board pay rise backdated to January 1.

The dispute included border security officers at Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch airports, health and safety inspectors, immigration officers, labour inspectors and industrial mediators.

Union may take legal action over strike breakers

The union representing boiler workers at Southland hospital on New Zealand's South Island is considering legal action after replacement workers were brought in to cover for strikers. At least one worker was flown in from Wellington to attend to boilers that supply the hospital with heat, hot water and steam for sterilising equipment.

The boiler attendants began a four-day strike after negotiations broke down between the union and the employer Spotless Services. The attendants want an extra week's holiday and increased pay. They claim that the extra week's leave, on top of the statutory requirement of four weeks, is in recognition that boilers needed to be manned around the clock every day. There will be further strike action this month if negotiations cannot be restarted.

NZ Polytechnic threatens staff over protest

Management at NorthTec Polytechnic in Whangarei, north of Auckland, threatened non-teaching staff with disciplinary action if they joined protest action on June 27. The protest and picket by members of the Tertiary Institutes Allied Staff Association (TIASA) was to demonstrate against NorthTec's negative approach to collective agreement negotiations.

Management wrote to individual staff members advising them that they would be suspended if they participated in the protest. Staff rejected the threats, saying they would not be deterred from protesting to achieve "a fair and reasonable settlement".



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