

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

## Indian tyre workers and supporters arrested

Nearly 3,000 MRF tyre factory workers and family members were arrested and held in a community centre by Tamil Nadu police on May 23, after a 24-hour protest outside labour commissioner's office in Chennai and the Vellore Collector's office. The demonstration was organised after police assaulted tyre workers and arrested 600 during an earlier protest outside MRF's Arakkonam plant.

Nearly 5,000 employees at MRF's Arakkonam and Puducherry plants in Tamil Nadu have been on strike since May 9 over wages and union rights. The MRF United Workers Union is not recognised by the company which responded to the walkout by locking out the striking Arakkonam workers.

Local media reported on May 26 that the tyre-workers had resumed their protests at the labour office and the Vellore Collector's office and are demanding the government intervene and resolve the dispute.

## Lucknow hospital employees strike

Medical services at the Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGI) in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, have been severely disrupted since May 26 when hospital staff began indefinite strike action over proposed wage cuts. Only emergency and dialysis services are operational and patients are being discharged early or transferred to other hospitals.

The hospital workers want the government to reverse its recent decision to reduce SGPGI pay to that of state level employees. Workers are also demanding payment of arrears outstanding since January 2006, in accordance with the Sixth Pay Commission report. The Uttar Pradesh government has threatened to take "strict action" against all hospital employees and declared that there would be no discussion until strikers return to work.

SGPGI is India's leading medical training institute and tertiary hospital with patients referred to the facility from all over India.

## Bank staff in India protest

State Bank of India employees demonstrated at the Seven Roads junction in Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh, on May 20 in support of pay claims. Union Forum of Bank Unions members have rejected an Indian Banks' Association offer of 15 percent and want a 24 percent pay rise. Bank employees' wages have not been revised since late 2007.

Union members also are opposing management proposals to outsource some jobs and are concerned at the non-implementation of compassionate appointments since 1995.

## Andhra Pradesh contract workers rally

Contractual and outsourced employees rallied in several Andhra Pradesh cities on May 20 demanding that the government establish a minimum wage for their sector. All India Trade Union Congress district secretary B. Ramaiah told a rally outside the Labour Office in Kadapa that the minimum monthly pay for skilled workers should be 10,000 rupees (\$US201) and 6,000 rupees for unskilled employees.

## Korean auto workers locked out

On May 26, South Korean auto manufacturer Ssangyong Motor Corporation locked out its entire workforce of 7,100 employees. The company claims the lock-out is in response to indefinite strike action by union members at its Pyeongtaek plant on May 21.

Ssangyong auto workers are protesting against a company restructuring plan to slash over 2,600 jobs. Since the restructure was announced early this year 1,400 workers have accepted redundancy packages.

Ssangyong sales nosedived by 76 percent in the first three months of this year and the company faced a bankruptcy court hearing last week. The Ssangyong labour union has called on the company's Chinese owners, the Shanghai Automotive Industry Corp (SAIC), to inject additional capital into the Korean automaker. SAIC has responded by declaring that unless the union accepts the job cuts, it will allow Ssangyong to collapse.

The court has given the company until September 15 to begin implementing the restructure and attract new investment.

### **Pakistan dairy food workers protest**

On May 23, 200 members of the Dalda Food Employees' Union, who make Unilever's Blue Band margarine in an outsourced factory, rallied at the Karachi Press Club demanding decent jobs, union rights and reinstatement of sacked union delegates.

The rally is part of a campaign which began a year ago after workers established a protest camp outside the Blue Band factory to push their demands. A Karachi court is currently hearing their case.

### **Pakistan workers rally over industrial relations act**

Pakistan Workers Federation (PWF) members demonstrated outside the National Press Club in Islamabad on May 19 in protest against the Industrial Relations Act 2008, which they claim undermines workers' basic rights. Protesters later marched to Parliament House carrying banners and placards inscribed with anti-government slogans.

PWF leaders addressed the rally calling for wage rises for low-paid workers and demanding that the government amend the industrial relations act so that it stops bonded-labor and the abuse of children in the workplace.

### **Bangladesh shrimp workers protest**

Shrimp industry labourers, supported by the Khulna Nagarik Samaj (Khulna urban society), formed a human chain at the Picture Palace crossing in Khulna on May 24 to demand that the minimum monthly wage be increased from 2,510 taka (\$US36.9) to 7,450 taka.

A speaker told the hour-long protest that said the official minimum wage, which was set by the government on May 18, was less than the daily wage of 180 taka (\$US2.63) paid to workers outside the shrimp industry.

### **Filipino shipyard workers file for strike**

The Nagkahiusang Mamumuo sa Baradero (Keppel Shipyard Cebu)-National Federation of Labor filed a strike notice at the National Conciliation and Mediation Board on May 24. The union alleges that Keppel management has resorted to union busting by imposing one-month forced leave on workers with no guarantee that they will given future employment.

A spokesman for the shipyard workers claim that Keppel has violated a 2008 Memorandum of Agreement in which management agreed to stop its redundancy program if the union withdrew its strike notice. Keppel, however, reneged on the deal and has forced 90 ship-building and repair workers to take redundancy. Under its plan 70 percent of 280 regular jobs will be eliminated.

The union rejects company claims that the job destruction is a result of the economic downturn and has accused management of trying to destroy the union and replace full-time employees with contract labour.

### **Telstra workers maintain industrial action**

More than 200 technicians employed by Telstra, Australia's largest telecommunications company, struck for 24 hours on May 27 as part of their campaign for a new collective agreement and a 5 to 7 percent wage increase. Communication, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) members from various work sites in Victoria marched through Melbourne's central business district to the telco's head office. Telstra employees on Enterprise Agreements have not had a pay rise in 19 months.

CEPU and Community and Public Sector Union members have organised a series of work bans and rolling stoppages since December in an attempt to force Telstra to negotiate a new collective agreement. The company's so-called Employee Collective Agreements have been overwhelmingly rejected by union members.

Telstra agreed this week to enter into "good faith bargaining with employees" but not until July 1.

### **Sydney government bus workers strike**

New South Wales government bus maintenance staff at the Willoughby depot in Sydney stopped work for three hours on May 27 over management plans to change the maintenance roster system. Maintenance staff rallied outside the bus depot waving placards before returning to

work. Around 190 services were affected.

per customer per year.

The Printing and Manufacturing Union members are linesmen and electricians and maintain the power network across Te Kuiti and the South Waikato region.

### **Auckland port workers issue strike notice**

Maritime Union of New Zealand members at the Ports of Auckland will hold a stop work meeting on June 5 to discuss management's proposed new work agreement. A union spokesman said the meeting will discuss ongoing negotiations on an expired collective agreement and management moves to end its permanent workforce at the Bledisloe Terminal with the loss of 29 jobs.

The maritime union claims that port management is attempting impose changes on the remaining workforce through restructuring that could not be achieved by negotiation.



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### **Auckland technical college staff protest over pay discrimination**

Tertiary Institutes Allied Staff Association (TIASA) members at the Auckland campus of Unitec are picketing the college after rejecting a management proposal for a new work agreement to replace a collective agreement that expired in December. The union wants parity with non-union members.

Unitec granted non-union members a 4 percent pay rise from January 1, but offered TIASA members just 2 percent. When Unitec finally agreed to enter negotiations in February it held fast to the 2 percent offer and attempted to remove some current conditions relating to Easter Tuesday and penalty rates. Unitec claimed that it was under pressure to meet government and State Services Commission "expectations" in the pay negotiations.

A TIASA spokesman said protests will escalate if the equity issue is not resolved.

### **New Zealand electricity workers threatened with lockout**

The New Zealand Lines Company on May 20 threatened to lock out 40 Te Kuiti-based workers without pay unless they dropped a 2 percent pay claim. The company claims that there's "no money" for the modest pay demand and says that it will have to increase power prices if workers get a pay rise.

The total cost of the 40 workers' wage claim is just \$26,000 (\$US13,200) a year. This is less than the \$30,000 pay rise the company's CEO personally pocketed last year. The union claims even if the company passed on the entire cost of its members' claims it would amount to \$1