

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.

Bangladesh: Striking rickshaw drivers shot by hired thugs

At least 50 people were injured, 20 by bullets, on June 20 when hired thugs tried to break up a four-day picket by rickshaw drivers and their supporters at the Second Buriganga Bridge in Dhaka. The attack continued for several hours until it was eventually stopped by police.

Some 1,400 rickshaw workers on the Keraniganj-Dhaka route began indefinite strike action and picketing of the bridge on June 16 in protest over a bridge toll increase. No traffic had crossed the bridge since the strike began.

Indian government engineers protest over death

About 20,000 government engineers in Bihar walked off the job for 48 hours on June 22 to demand a police investigation into the death of Yogendra Pandey, a Sitamarhi road division executive engineer. Pandey allegedly jumped to his death from the collectorate building on June 18.

Engineering Services Coordination Committee President A.N. Jha Anal said that his members would take indefinite state-wide action if their demand for an investigation was not met by June 24.

Indian bank employees protest mergers

Over 6,000 State Bank of Indore employees struck on June 22 and rallied outside more than 500 branches in protest over the bank's merger with the State Bank of India (SBI). Bank workers claim that there had been no consultations about the merger and it would impact on jobs and

conditions.

State Bank of Indore Employees' Co-ordination Committee General Secretary J.P. Jhwar said workers have vowed to continue their strike action. The government also plans to merge five associated Bank of India institutions with the SBI. The State Bank of Saurashtra was integrated into SBI last year.

Tamil Nadu bank workers protest

Pandyan Grama Bank employees in Virudhunagar held a one-day hunger protest to demand regular work for temporary clerks, all existing vacancies filled and the removal of salary anomalies for promoted clerks.

A spokesman said bank workers also wanted compensation for bank expansions introduced during the past 15 years which had created staff shortages and undermined conditions.

Punjab police arrest teachers

Almost 100 contract teachers in Chandigarh, Punjab were arrested on June 19 during a protest march to the Sector 9 home secretary's office. While the women protestors were released around midnight, male teachers were only granted bail after appearing before a magistrates court next day.

The demonstration was part of a three-day protest to demand work regularisation for contract teachers. "We have been working for many years but there is no talk of our jobs being regularised," said teacher Raj Mohan.

Physical education teachers in Karnataka demonstrate

Physical education (PE) teachers in Karnataka have begun a state-wide campaign to demand promotion after 20 years' service, improved work

facilities, all vacant teachers' jobs filled and formation of a sports policy. On June 20 over 100 teachers demonstrated outside the deputy commissioner's office in Mysore.

Mysore District Physical Education Teachers Association organised the demonstration. Karnataka Physical Education Teachers Association members plan to rally at Vidhana Soudha on July 10 and present their demands to the Karnataka chief minister and education minister.

Indian steel workers protest

Rourkela Steel Plant contract workers in Orissa demonstrated outside the plant on June 21 to demand a 1,000-rupee (\$US20) rise, minimum wage parity with regular employees and improved working conditions. Contract workers' wages have not been increased for 13 years.

Rourkela Contractor Workers' Union members have planned indefinite strike action from June 29 if their demands are not met.

Sri Lankan nurses continue industrial action

Maharagama Cancer Hospital nurses are maintaining bans on cytotoxic (radioactive chemotherapy) injections at the country's only dedicated cancer hospital. All Ceylon Nurses Union members want a monthly risk allowance of 10,000 rupees (\$US86), training in handling radioactive injections and a two-million rupee life insurance cover.

Union organiser Sisira Senaratne claimed that nurses faced numerous health problems, including severe headaches and miscarriages, through their exposure to radioactive injections. Senaratne said a meeting with the authorities on June 19 ended inconclusively and that the nurses had decided to continue industrial action.

Thailand rail workers end strike

A two-day national strike by over 270 members of the State Railway of Thailand (SRT) labour union ended on June 23 after the government agreed to hold a joint review with the SRT board over a planned restructure.

The proposed restructure divides the SRT into three subsidiaries: track maintenance, train operations, and assets management. Workers opposed the break-up, insisting it was a first step toward privatisation.

The government claims that it has no plans for privatisation but has advertised for a private operator to manage the soon to be completed Airport Rail Link between Suvarnabhumi Airport and inner Bangkok.

Philippines lampshade workers suspended

Around 300 striking employees of lampshade manufacturer Paul Yu in the Mactan Export Processing Zone, Lapu-Lapu City were suspended for 30 days on June 22. Paul Yu Workers' Association members began an indefinite strike last week demanding better conditions and the reinstatement of seven suspended union leaders who organised a strike on May 8 over long-standing grievances.

Outstanding workers' demands include abolition of outsourcing and the introduction of permanency for irregular employees, break time and payment of holiday pay and paternity leave. Paul Yu employs around 1,000 people.

Western Australia power workers strike

Over 700 workers from state-owned energy utility Western Power walked out for four hours on June 25 over the corporation's attempt to impose a five-year non-union collective agreement before the federal Labor government's Fair Work Australia Act comes into force on July 1.

Under the new industrial laws employers have to negotiate a collective agreement with the union. Western Power, which distributes electricity in the south west of the state, directed its 1,900 employees this week to begin voting on the non-union agreement.

Australian Services Union members, who make up 35 percent of Western Power's workforce, have been implementing rolling stoppages and work bans for the past five weeks as part of a 10-month struggle for a union agreement. The striking workers included fault repairers, network officers, electrical inspectors, engineers and administrative staff.

Victorian paramedics escalate bans

Ambulance Victoria paramedics this week stepped up industrial action for improved wages and conditions. Year-long negotiations with the state Labor government have stalled over demands for a minimum 10-hour break between shifts. Paramedics in Victoria are only given eight-hour breaks.

Paramedics began their industrial campaign on June 19 by taking 10-hour breaks between shifts. The latest action includes refusing to enter billing data for the first four hours of their shifts and a ban on the computer-based patient care record system.

Paramedics claimed that staff shortages force them to work 16-hour shifts. Ambulance Victoria management claims there is no evidence to suggest that paramedic fatigue has any impact on patient safety.

Queensland electricians locked out

Some 14 Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members were locked out of Utility Asset Management (UAM) work sites at Forsyth and Georgetown in far north Queensland on June 22 after taking industrial action over a new workplace agreement.

The ETU has been in talks with UAM, a Cairns-based contractor, for 12 months over demands for a 13.5 percent pay increase. The union is launching legal action against the company over the lockout.

Government contract cleaners protest

Fifty federal and state government contract cleaners from across Australia rallied at Parliament House, Canberra on June 18 to demand that their shifts be increased to a minimum of four hours, in line with contract cleaners in the private sector.

Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union (LHMU) national secretary Louise Tarrant said many cleaners were spending more time travelling to the job than at work. Melbourne cleaner Helen Izvernarin said she spent two hours travelling for a three-hour shift cleaning government buildings.

The rally is part of the LHMU's campaign to get cleaners across Australia signed up to Clean Start Collective Agreements.

Nurses demonstrate at NSW nursing home

Around a dozen nurses and union delegates rallied at the Peninsula Village in Umina, New South Wales on June 25 against a management directive that all staff, including cleaners and administration staff, vote on a non-union agreement. Protestors held placards urging employees to "Vote No" in the ballot.

The nurses claim that the non-union agreement will reclassify them as care service employees, cut shift penalties and only grant pay rises if the nurses are able to prove that their skill levels have changed. The agreement also eliminates laundry allowances, reduces on-call allowances and slashes salary loadings for higher duties to 10 percent. Nurses have been offered an extra \$1.15 (\$US0.76) an hour in compensation.

New Caledonia airport workers rally at court

Kanak and Exploited Workers Union (USTKE) members rallied in downtown Noumea on June 16 as court hearings began for 16 members, including union president Gerard Jodar, on charges relating to protests at Noumea airport on May 28 that involved blocking the runway and boarding an AirCal flight. USTKE claims that the protest was intended to be peaceful and that those involved boarded the airplane to protect themselves against police who fired teargas and deafening grenades.

USTKE wants AirCal to pay wages deducted during strike action over the dismissal of a Kanak employee. Workers resumed their duties on June 14, after Jodar signed a settlement drawn up by government mediators. AirCal has refused to sign the document, objecting to a clause directing it to drop complaints against USTKE members. The trial is expected to continue until June 29.



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