

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

25 July 2009

## India: Maharashtra teachers continue strike action

Thirty thousand Maharashtra Federation of College Teachers' Organisation members are continuing strike action after a week of talks with the department of higher education. The teachers walked out on July 14 to demand implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations and an end to discrimination against 10,000 union members who have not cleared a national and state eligibility test.

The teachers allege that the eligibility examination, which was not mandatory until 1999, is denying placement benefits to senior teachers with up to 18 years' experience and keeping them on a lower pay scale.

About 2,000 teachers planned to meet the Higher and Technical Education Minister Rajesh Tope this week during a cabinet meeting in Nashik.

## Power and health workers in Maharashtra strike for pay

Around 100,000 power workers from three state-owned power companies in Maharashtra struck on July 20 after their union reached a deadlock in negotiations for a 60 percent pay rise. Power was disrupted for up to three hours in many districts. The strike ended after 24 hours when the power workers accepted a 30 percent pay increase.

On July 21, 8,000 Maharashtra doctors and senior health officials walked out to demand pay parity with Indian central government staff. They also want non-practising allowances and the filling of all vacant positions.

## Public sector workers in Jammu and Kashmir walk out

Almost half a million government employees in Jammu and Kashmir struck for two days on July 20 to demand implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations and an extension of the retirement age from 58 to 60. Workers held rallies outside various district government headquarters, including Sher-e-Kashmir Park, Lal Chowk, and Shaheed Gunj in Srinagar.

## Lucknow university employees strike

Teachers and staff of Bhatkhande Deemed Music University (BDMU) in Lucknow began indefinite strike action on July 20 to demand Sixth Pay Commission wage rises, regularisation of long-serving casual workers and improved appointment and promotional opportunities.

They also want pensions for retired employees and dependants of deceased employees, travel and dearness allowances, and entitlements on par with other government university workers. The strike was called by the Bhatkhande Sangeet Sansthaan Vishwavidyalaya Lucknow Karmchhari Shikshak Sangh.

## Indian auto-rickshaw drivers strike

Auto-rickshaw drivers in Chennai, Tamil Nadu struck for 12 hours on July 17 over high fuel costs. Rickshaw unions are demanding that petrol and diesel prices be reduced in line with declining international crude oil rates and the provision of subsidised diesel for rickshaws operating in Chennai.

## Indian public transport workers protest

Andhra Pradesh State Road Transportation Corporation employees rallied in Kadapa on July 21 to demand interim pay relief until their long outstanding 12-point log of claims is resolved.

Their demands include pay parity with state government employees, double wages for double duties, regularisation of casual workers, an end to labour outsourcing at RTC garages, withdrawal of increased duties and payment of 2008-09 leave.

## Karnataka daily wage workers demand permanency

Some 50 members of the Karnataka State Government Daily Wage Employees' Federation protested outside the Deputy Commissioner's office in Bidar last week to demand permanency and full benefits for daily wage employees who have completed 10 years' service. They also want the retirement age extended to 60 years for all other daily wage workers, as per other state government employees. Department of Forest daily wage workers told the media that they have not been paid for 18 months.

### **Bihar state construction workers rally for welfare and wages**

Building workers rallied at the Labor Building in Patna, Bihar on July 17 to call for a 400-rupee (\$US8.20) monthly wage rise and welfare payments. Other demands include a 50,000-rupee home-building grant, a 1,000-rupee monthly pension for workers over 60 years, 100,000 rupees compensation for families of accident victims, six months' maternity leave for women employees and free health care. Workers with marriage-age daughters also want a 25,000-rupee government grant.

Building Construction Workers Labor Union secretary Harideo Thakur told the local media: "The rising cost of living has forced us to live in sub-standard conditions where workers are struggling to feed their families. Under these circumstances it has become increasingly difficult for us to work at the current wage rate."

### **Pakistan: Help line workers protest police brutality**

Members of the Women Workers Help Line (WWHL) rallied outside the Lahore Press Club on July 20 over a vicious baton-charge attack by Civil Lines Police on demonstrating workers last week. Many protesters were injured and some hospitalised during the police assault. The July 20 protesters held banners and placards saying, "Stop violence against women" and demanding immediate suspension of the head of the Civil Lines police.

Last week's demonstration was over recent food and petrol price rises and was organised by the WWHL, Pakistan National Trade Union Federation, the Labour Education Foundation and other labour organisations. Police attacked the demonstrators as they marched from Chairing Cross, Lahore towards the governor's house.

### **Pakistan: Peshawar power workers protest over deaths**

Wapda Hydro Electric Central Labour Union members are maintaining a protest camp established on July 16 outside the Peshawar Press Club to demand that the government compensate the family of a linesman recently killed in a bomb blast whilst on duty. The union also wants improved security for Water and Power Development Authority employees at tower sites on the outskirts of Peshawar. The towers have come under continuous bomb attacks.

The union claims that more than 30 employees have been killed so far but no compensation paid to their families. The power workers have threatened to cut electricity to the houses of the governor and chief minister, if their demands are not met.

### **Sri Lankan cancer nurses walk out**

Maharagama Cancer Hospital (MCI) nurses walked out on July 22 and picketed the hospital to oppose the forced transfer of 54 nurses to the National Hospital and the Angoda Infectious Diseases Hospital after they

took industrial action last month.

All Ceylon Nurses Union members at MCI struck for over a week in June demanding life insurance, a monthly risk allowance of 10,000 rupees (\$US86) and training in handling radioactive injections. The nurses have lodged complaints about health problems, including severe headaches and miscarriages, caused by their exposure to radioactive injections.

Union secretary Anura Jayamanna said: "Our demand was to remove or minimise the risk factor attached in administering chemotherapy but not to remove the experienced nurses and leave the risk factor endangering the new set of nurses to be transferred to the MCI."

Nurses at Kandy and Kurunegala hospitals have held demonstrations supporting the MCI nurses.

### **Cambodian garment workers end strike**

Striking employees from the Xing Tai garment factory in Sen Sok, Cambodia ended a three-day strike last week after management met some of their demands. Around 400 workers walked off the job on July 14 and rallied at the factory gates over poor working conditions, which they said included inadequate toilets and hot, windowless work spaces.

Garment workers said fans and improved lighting had been installed but their demand that a sacked union delegate be reinstated has not been met. One employee told the media, "We will protest again, and it could be even bigger if the factory representative is not reinstated."

### **Queensland teachers suspend industrial action**

The Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) suspended work bans and scheduled rolling strikes following negotiations in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission on July 20. The 37,000-strong public school teachers' union and the state government are continuing negotiations in the commission over a new workplace agreement.

Teachers struck for 24 hours on May 19 and implemented work bans, after rejecting a 12.5 percent pay rise over three years. State Treasurer Andrew Fraser has declared that the structure of the pay offer is open to negotiation but not the amount. Teachers want pay parity with their interstate colleagues.

QTU president Steve Ryan claimed that the government's 12.5 percent offer meant that union members would still be earning between \$4,000 and \$7,000 a year less than interstate teachers.

### **Sugar mill workers threaten strike action**

Bundaberg Sugar employees are currently voting on industrial action to protect their leave entitlements. The Australian Workers' Union (AWU), Electrical Trades Union and Australian Metal Workers Union have been deadlocked in negotiations since April over a new work agreement covering the company's 250 mill workers.

Bundaberg Sugar—Queensland's largest cane grower and the owner-operator of three sugar mills—has offered a 3.5 percent annual pay increase for two years. The rise is conditional on buying out one week of annual leave.

The unions applied to Fair Work Australia for protected industrial action

after a rally of 200 workers in Bundaberg last week voted unanimously for industrial action to defend conditions, including five days' travel entitlement, which has been in place for almost 30 years.

AWU spokesman Chris Simpson said the industrial action could include work stoppages of up to 48 hours and bans on call-outs and overtime. The strike ballot will close on August 19.

### **New Zealand university union negotiates award rationalisation**

New Zealand's eight universities and the Tertiary Education Union began negotiations this week for a new multi-employer agreement. The union has been given the go-ahead by its members to negotiate the amalgamation of 21 existing collective agreements across eight universities into just two—one for academics and one for general staff.

Employees also want no forced redundancies for the duration of the agreement, gender equity, limits to workload and the inclusion of basic legal working conditions into their collective agreement.



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