

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.

China: Black-lung protest for compensation

About 120 migrant workers suffering from pneumoconiosis (black-lung disease) staged a sit-down strike at the Shenzhen local municipal government building on July 30 to demand compensation. The workers, all from Daozi county in Hunan province, have been involved in pile blasting and drilling in Shenzhen since the 1980s and contracted the disease building China's first special economic zone.

The workers have rejected a one-off 30,000-yuan (\$4,385) payment from the local government and want 200,000 yuan for those with the first stage of the disease and 50,000 yuan for each stage after that.

"Some of the workers are so sick that they won't live for many years without proper medical treatment. Their families have spent every penny to cure the disease," said Xu Zhihui, a spokesman for the workers who also suffers from black lung. Xu said the sit-down strike would continue until their demands were considered by the government.

Bangladeshi dock workers suspend strike

The Chittagong Port Dock Workers-Employees' Federation postponed a four-hour strike scheduled for August 3 after meeting with port authorities. Last week seven unions called for strike action in all branches of the port to demand reinstatement of retrenched workers and revival of the Dock Labour Management Board.

Over 6,000 dock workers have been retrenched since 2007 when the board was dissolved and other measures introduced to eventually privatise the port. Dock Bandar Sramik Karmachari Federation joint secretary Abdul Ahad told the media that retrenched workers were not paid their due benefits when they were forced to quit.

Union negotiators have accepted a Chittagong Port Authority proposal to negotiate separately with each labour unit and prepare a charter of demands to present to the government.

Bangladeshi jute mill workers demand unpaid wages

Over 2,000 employees from the privately run People's Jute Mills Limited in Khulna picketed the manager's office on July 29 to demand payment of two weeks' outstanding wages and a festival bonus before mill management is returned to the state-owned Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation this month.

Workers have threatened further action unless "management pays our arrears and returns spare parts of important machines looted after leaseholder Kazi Farms Limited decided to hand back management to BJMC."

Bangladeshi medical workers end strike

Sixty-three medical staff, including eight physicians at the Magura Sadar hospital in Magura, Pirojpur, ended a two-day strike after the local MP promised their demands would be fulfilled immediately. Staff walked out on August 1 to demand payment of 67 months' of salary arrears and for their jobs to be guaranteed through the revenue budget.

The medical team was recruited in 1998 to upgrade the 50-bed hospital to 100 beds but the finance ministry stopped funding after the project ended.

Indian university employees demand pay rise

Around 1,300 non-teaching staff at the University of Pune in Maharashtra struck on August 4 as part of state-wide action to demand Sixth Pay Commission increases. Other demands include the exemption of non-teaching staff from the state government's new pension scheme and a committee to investigate anomalies in the Fourth and Fifth Pay Commission packages.

On July 31, over 500 non-teaching staff at Nagpur University in Maharashtra marched to the joint director of education's office to demand a pay rise.

Meanwhile, members of the Maharashtra Federation of University and College Teachers' Organisations are maintaining strike action begun on July 22 for Sixth Pay Commission wage rises.

On August 3, university and college teachers in Punjab and Chandigarh staged a sit-down protest at their respective campuses for two hours demanding implementation of the revised University Grant Commission pay scales approved in June by the Punjab cabinet.

Indian telecom workers demonstrate

BSNL (Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited) Employees Union members demonstrated at BSNL offices in Tuticorin, Tirunelveli and Palayamkottai on July 31 to demand immediate finalisation of wage revision and implementation of a new promotion policy. Telecom workers also want BSNL to abandon its “anti-worker” policies.

The union plans more demonstrations at BSNL district headquarters followed by 24-hour strikes on August 19 and 20.

Uttar Pradesh municipal workers demonstrate

Allahabad Municipal Corporation employees rallied outside the divisional commissioner’s office on August 3 over the non-payment of salaries. Allahabad Nagar Nigam Karamchari Sangh members also demanded regularisation of contract and daily wage employees.

Union general secretary Rajendra Paliwal told the rally that non-payment of salaries meant that council employees’ families and local pensioners were on the brink of starvation.

Railway gate workers in Sri Lanka demonstrate

Hundreds of workers who supervise unprotected railway crossings in Sri Lanka protested outside the Transport Ministry on July 29 to demand permanent jobs and other benefits. Their current daily wage is just 365 rupees (\$US3.17).

All Ceylon Railway General Employees Union convenor Sumathipala Manawadu told the local media that around 8,000 workers manning at unprotected level crossings faced extreme poverty because of their low wages. He said the railway crossing workers had vowed to fight until they won their demands.

Philippines: Export zone workers demand redundancy payments

Some 50 agency employees of electronics firm Celestica in the Mactan Export Processing Zone I, Mandaue City, struck and rallied at the factory gates before marching to their employer’s office, Cebu General Services, on July 31. Celestica is closing the factory at the end of August and will retrench all staff, including 300 agency employees who have been refused termination compensation.

The striking agency workers want termination benefits similar to those received by Celestica’s regular employees who receive 45 days’ pay for each year of service. The agency promised to redeploy them to new jobs at Pentax but Pentax will only hire workers younger than 28 years. All the Celestica workers are over 30.

Indonesian domestic workers rally

About 100 domestic workers rallied at the Hotel Indonesia on August 2 to demand the government adopt laws to protect the low-paid workers. Indonesia has about nine million domestic employees, including more than six million working abroad. Many are prone to violence and other

forms of abuse by their employers.

Most domestic workers live at their employers’ homes, often working long hours with little free time. The National Network for Domestic Workers Advocacy has received 472 reports from domestic workers alleging abuse or wrongdoing by their employers over the past five years. Cases include sexual harassment, delayed or denied wages and excessive workloads.

New South Wales prison officers walk out

Some 3,700 prison officers from around NSW walked off the job for 24 hours on August 7 and rallied outside ministerial offices in Sydney’s central business district against state Labor government plans to privatise Parklea prison.

About 600 prison officers in Sydney, Bathurst, Kirkconnell and Lithgow walked off the job in June over the government’s cost-cutting prison privatisation plans.

The Public Service Association (PSA) claims that prison officers are willing to accept reforms and deliver “sensible savings”. In early May the government reversed its plan to privatise Cessnock prison in the Hunter region after the union agreed to significant concessions. These included employment of 300 casuals, centralised rostering, a new absenteeism policy and revised workforce management plans.

University of Melbourne staff endorse strike action

Around 200 members of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) at the University of Melbourne have voted to strike on August 11 and September 3 against the axing of 220 jobs. University administration announced last week that it plans to eliminate the jobs, claiming the financial crisis had decimated earnings from its endowment fund.

Meanwhile, the NTEU is planning a 24-hour national strike on September 16 for a new workplace agreement covering members at 30 universities. The NTEU wants annual pay rises of between 4 and 6 percent, stricter workload regulation, restoration of union rights and limits on the use of fixed contracts.

Some 10,000 university staff in Victoria struck for 24 hours in May as part of a national campaign to restore conditions lost under the Howard government. In 2005, individual agreements were imposed on all university employees, limits removed on the number of casuals and union access to members restricted. Restoration of conditions lost has become the main sticking point in negotiations.

Protests continue over sacked council workers

Hundreds of workers stormed the Greater Geelong council chambers in regional Victoria on Tuesday over the recent sacking of two council workers. The demonstration follows a rally by around 200 workers on July 28 demanding the two be reinstated.

Mick Van Beek and Peter Anderson were dismissed after they used waste asphalt to fill two hazardous pot holes in Leopold Sports Club car park. The council workers are also under fire because they accepted a steak sandwich from club management in appreciation of their work.

Council CEO Stephen Griffin offered to reinstate Van Bee but not Anderson in a bid to split the workforce and undermine community support. The offer has been rejected and the Australian Services Union has lodged a claim with the Fair Work Australia workplace relations tribunal over the issue.

Western Australia public school employees stop work

Over 1,000 teachers' assistants and cleaners at state government schools in Perth held a stop-work meeting on August 9 to discuss their campaign for a 20 percent pay rise over three years. The Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMWU) members rejected the government's latest offer of 8 percent over three years.

The union, which covers 10,000 state school employees, also wants permanency for those on fixed-term contracts and improved safety and security in schools, particularly for cleaners and gardeners. LHMWU members will attend stop-work meetings in country areas next week and are expected to reject the latest government offer.

New Zealand telecommunications technicians strike for job security

Some 120 telecommunications technicians employed in the Northland region by Downer EDI, a Telecom NZ contractor, held a two-day strike on August 3 and marched through Whangarei township. Two days later, 100 Downer technicians in Auckland walked off the job as part of an ongoing national campaign over job security.

Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU) members are protesting Telecom's planned restructure that would see Downer EDI and Transfield Services, Telecom's other contractor, replaced by Visionstream, which would force around 900 technicians to become owner-operators, or lose their jobs. Telecom NZ is not offering redundancy for engineers not willing to transfer to Visionstream.

The technicians could be forced to spend up to \$60,000 (\$US38,700) to buy their own vehicles and tools. They would also lose job security and be forced to pay their own insurance and vehicle repair costs.

Auckland bus drivers hold stop-work meetings

Some 872 employees of NZ Bus in Auckland and the North Shore held stop-work meetings this week to demand better pay and conditions. NZ Bus is offering its workers a 3.5 percent pay rise, while the four unions representing drivers and cleaners want a 6.8 percent increase. Other demands include restoration of overtime and penal pay rates to time and a half—up from the current time and a quarter.

Auckland Tramways Union spokesman Gary Froggatt said the 3.3 percent offer was from a low starting rate of just over \$14 (\$US9) per hour, which rises to \$15.30 after several months on the road.

Teachers and students reject funding cuts

Over 500 teachers, students and supporters marched from Wellington High School to parliament on August 4 to protest multimillion-dollar funding cuts to adult community education courses throughout New Zealand. The National government's 2009 budget cut 80 percent of funding from adult and community education in schools.

The cuts mean annual funding will fall by about \$54 million. Schools have already begun shutting down their community education programmes and sacking teachers. Community groups are angry that the government has allocated \$35 million to increase its subsidy to private schools.

New Caledonia USTKE members continue protests

On August 4, striking Kanak and Exploited Workers Union (USTKE) members picketed the government administration building in Poindimie and maintained road barricades in downtown Noumea and St Louis over the imprisonment of six union leaders last month.

The sentences relate to a union occupation of Noumea airport and the boarding of an AirCal aircraft on May 28 over the sacking of an AirCal employee. Union leader Gerard Jodar and another official received 12-month terms and four others between 4- and 10-month terms. Eighteen other union members were given four-month suspended jail terms.

Thousands of striking workers have clashed with police and security forces at union pickets and road blocks during the past two weeks. At least ten protestors have been arrested and police have used teargas in unsuccessful attempts to disperse the workers.

Solomon Islands public servants issue strike notice

The Solomon Islands Public Employees Union (SIPEU), which represents the country's 13,000 public servants, has threatened to strike on August 17 over a log of claims. Demands include a cost of living increase, improved allowances for accommodation, and compensation for property damage caused by the 2007 tsunami.

While the log of claims is a long-standing issue, the SIPEU previously decided not to pursue its demands because of government budget restraints. The union decided to push for its claims after parliamentarians recently received substantial increases in their entitlements. Western province public sector workers walked out in June over their claims.



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