

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.

Bangladeshi tea workers on indefinite strike

Workers from four tea estates in Bangladesh's Habiganj district began indefinite strike action on January 5 to demand recognition of a union committee elected in October 2008. The labour and manpower ministry dissolved the committee on November 24 last year and formed an ad-hoc committee of government supporters which took over the tea worker's union office. The striking estate workers want Labor House, head office of Bangladesh Tea Labor Union at Srimongal, returned to their elected officials.

The Bangladeshi tea industry has been in turmoil over the issue during the last two months with rallies and demonstrations occurring in the Sylhet region on an almost daily basis. Bangladesh has over 160 tea estates with 140 in the Sylhet region.

India: Maharashtra rickshaw drivers strike

Auto-rickshaw drivers in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad, Maharashtra began an indefinite walkout on January 2. Rickshaw Panchayat and other auto-rickshaw organisations are demanding that the government grant "public utility" status for auto-rickshaws and withdraw a one-rupee fare cut (12.5 percent) per kilometre imposed in May 2009.

The strike has had a major effect on commuter transport, forcing authorities to provide an additional 50 buses daily during the strike. The Regional Transport Office and police commissioner have called on the Rickshaw Panchayat president Dr Baba Adhav to call off the strike and resolve the issues through negotiations.

Indian public transport workers walkout in Kerala

Thousands of Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) workers struck for one day on January 5 to demand the government honour a previous agreement to increase Dearness Allowance (DA) payments.

Transport services were severely affected in all areas of the state except in Kerala's capital Thiruvananthapuram where the public transport workers union is affiliated to the ruling Stalinist CPI (M), dissociated itself from the walkout and maintained services.

Tamil Nadu transport workers demonstrate

Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC) workers demonstrated outside the TNSTC regional office on January 5 over management's anti-labour policies. Bus drivers claimed that they were being forced to work without rest for 10-16 hours. The Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation Workers Union urged TNSTC management to end its vindictive attitude towards conductors and drivers.

Andhra Pradesh telecommunications workers protest

Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) telecom workers staged a lunch-hour demonstration in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh over the state government's privatisation policies. The protesting employees have threatened to take further action to stop the government undermining the state-own telecommunication company. Workers also expressed concern over the BSNL's declining income.

Pakistan doctors protest

Young Doctors Association (YDA) members held a protest march from Mayo Hospital, Lahore to the Chowk GPO on January 2 to demand changes to the Health Care Commission Bill 2009. The doctors also want

pay rises and other improvements in working conditions. Traffic was severely affected during the demonstration.

YDA members are demanding salary increases for doctors in all six categories—from house officer to professor—a regular service structure and an end to the practise of registering murder cases against doctors. The Health Care Commission Bill is currently being debated in the Punjab parliament. The doctors claim that the proposed legislation is intrusive and gives unlimited powers to junior grade inspectors to impose disciplinary action.

Sri Lankan immigration staff on work-to-rule

Immigration and Emigration department workers at Sri Lanka's Bandaranaike International Airport began a three day work-to-rule campaign on January 4 to demand salary anomalies be rectified and that a work schedule and incentive scheme, particularly for night shift, be implemented.

The industrial campaign, which caused long delays in processing airport passengers, ended on Wednesday, after Sri Lanka's presidential secretary Lalith Weerunga promised to discuss employees' demands after the presidential elections on January 26.

Immigration and Emigration department workers' spokesman, R. A. Gonsal Koral, told the media: "The relevant authorities took no notice of our demands so we turned towards a work to rule campaign where we took at least four to five minutes to check one person as we rightly should. Usually we exercise only some 30 seconds per person as the time frame given is limited and the number of passengers is many."

Sri Lankan nurses demand better salaries

Nurses at 15 Sri Lankan teaching and general hospitals held lunch break protest on January 6, the second in a month, to make a series of demands. These include, payment of salaries in keeping with employee's professional qualifications, an additional allowance of 3,000 rupees (\$US26), grade one promotions after 11 years' service, a five-day week, restructuring recruitment methods and introduction of a four-year degree course.

The Government Nursing Officers' Association said it had made representations to the Health Ministry and the Salaries and Cadres Commission over these issues during the last four years but to no avail.

Philippines bank union issues strike notice

The Independent Labor Union covering employees at HSBC's credit card section in Metro Manila issued a strike notice this week to oppose the replacement of forcibly transferred staff with contract employees. The union is currently negotiating with HSBC and the National Conciliation and Mediation Board over several restructuring related issues.

The union claims that the forced transfer of 450 staff in October was "constructive dismissal" because many of the workers had to resign because of difficulties travelling to the new work locations in neighbouring cities. Another issue of dispute with HSBC is the dismissal of 40 employees from its customer service inbound unit. The company made the workers redundant but has retained the service.

Maritime workers to strike over wages

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members from the Farstad shipping company on the North West Shelf in Western Australia have threatened to strike for 48 hours this weekend as part of their campaign for a 30 percent pay rise over three years. MUA members also want a training allowance of up to \$300 per day to bring them into line with construction workers on offshore oil and gas projects. A 24-hour walkout is planned for Tuesday.

The strike action follows last month's two-day walkout at Total Marine Services. Farstad and Total Marine Services are contractors for oil and gas companies, such as Woodside, Shell, Chevron and ExxonMobil in the North West Shelf and Bass Strait.

The Australian Mines and Metals Association called on the Labor government yesterday to use its Fair Work Australia industrial laws to ban the strikes. The employer group claims that the pay demands will increase maritime workers' wages by \$90,000 a year. This has been rejected by the MUA which says the claim amounts to \$24,000 and in line with other employees in the sector.

New South Wales nurses plan protest

Nurses at the Griffith Base Hospital in NSW will protest on January 27 against dangerous staff cuts. While the Greater Southern Area Health Service says its plan to match staffing with patient demand will not affect health care, the Australian Nurses Federation claims the measure is a cost-cutting exercise and will mean the loss of key frontline staff.

The dispute came to a head after hospital management announced that it would reduce staffing by up to one-third in the cardiac, intensive care and discharge units. Nurses' union branch president Skye Vagg said similar restructuring cuts had been tried before and were "unsafe".

NSW meat workers oppose shift cuts

The Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMEIU) has lodged a complaint with Fair Work Australia against shift cutbacks for 400 casual staff at Fletcher International's meat processing plant in Dubbo, NSW. The company is offering employees one week on and one week off until sheep supplies return to normal.

However, AMEIU state secretary Charlie Donzow said the sheep industry will not recover for at least two years, "leaving workers without enough pay". The union is seeking redundancy payments for the affected workers.

Tasmanian heritage officers on strike

Heritage officers from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (TALSC) walked off the job on November 7 protesting that a culturally sensitive site is being developed without proper consultation. The officers, who are employed to assess building and construction sites on Aboriginal heritage areas, are concerned that road works at Brighton, north of Hobart will damage Aboriginal artefacts.

The strike was sparked after Tasmania's premier David Bartlett refused to meet with 21 TALSC representatives insisting that their delegation be reduced to three. TALSC spokesperson Fiona Newson told the media that the state government's "consultation process" was virtually non-existent.



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