

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 miners on indefinite strike

Over 1,000 miners at the Barapukuria coal field, near Dinajpur, resumed strike action on March 24, after employers failed to honour a wage agreement. Miners suspended strike action last month, following employers' assurances that a decision on a salary increase would be made by March 20.

The miners allege that under a 2008 tripartite deal between Barapukuria Coal Mining Company, Chinese contractor XMC and the unions, they would be paid their annual wage increment each February. Noor Islam, general secretary of the miner's union, said the workers had reminded XMC about the agreement but had received no response.

Garment workers demonstrate in Bangladesh

Traffic in Dhaka, the Bangladeshi capital, was disrupted for several hours on March 22 after workers from 20 garment factories in the Tejgaon Industrial Area rallied in support of 200 locked-out employees from Focus Fashion. Protesters returned to work after intervention by police. The Focus Fashion workers were locked out after demanding annual salary increases and realistic production rates.

Bangladeshi port workers strike

On March 22, several hundred members of Chittagong Dock Bandar Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad struck for three hours and held a sit-in to demand reinstatement of several thousand retrenched dock workers. Around 4,200 workers have been retrenched since 2007 when the dock management board was dissolved.

After strike action last August, the Chittagong Port Authority agreed to set up a multi-representative committee and reinstated 1,800 workers. Another 2,500 reinstatements have been approved by the committee but the union alleges that the port authority is delaying the reinstatements in line with plans to privatise the facility.

Planned industrial action by the dock workers included a protest at the Chittagong Press Club this week, a rally at the port this Saturday and an 8-hour strike on Sunday.

Pakistani hotel workers end occupation

Around 200 employees occupying the Pearl Continental Karachi Hotel basement ended a 25-day protest on March 20 after management agreed to reinstate four union officers. Four hunger strikers were hospitalised after the sit-in ended.

While the hotel workers held daily demonstrations and picketed the hotel, Pearl Continental management used agency workers and Karachi Marriott employees to maintain operations during the strike.

Filipino bakery workers attacked

More than 150 striking bakery workers were violently attacked by security guards and strike breakers on a picket at the Goldilocks' main bakeshop in Mandaluyong City on March 19. At least eight workers sustained serious head and limb injuries.

Bukluran ng Independenteng Samahan na Itinatag sa Goldilocks (BISIG) members began picketing the bakery on March 11, in protest against the sacking of 127 workers over an alleged illegal strike. BISIG wants reinstatement of the retrenched employees and a certification ballot to settle a dispute with BUKLOD, another Goldilocks union, over which organisation should be the workers' bargaining agent.

Queensland Catholic school teachers walk out

Around 1,000 striking teachers from 43 of Queensland's 288 Catholic Schools rallied this week in Brisbane and six major provincial towns to demand pay increases in line with other states. At least seven schools were closed by the March 25 strike.

Teachers have rejected an offer from the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) of a 4 percent pay rise in July 2010 and July 2011 on top of a 4.5 percent pay rise granted in May last year.

Queensland Independent Education Union secretary Terry Burke claimed the offer was not "good enough" and if accepted would ensure that Queensland Catholic teachers remained the lowest paid in Australia's non-government sector.

Negotiations for a new work agreement have been underway for over 12 months. QCEC has agreed to hold further talks with the union next week.

Victorian printing workers demand entitlements

Around 145 stood-down workers from Paragon Printing in Wodonga on the Victorian/NSW border are demanding reinstatement or full payment of their wages and entitlements after the company was placed in administration on March 9 with more than \$20 million in debts.

One of the picketers, Shayna Watson, told ABC Radio: "We are prepared to see this through to the end. We want our jobs back or we want our entitlements. All we are asking for is what we're entitled to." Eric Delphin, who has worked for Paragon Printing for 32 years, told the local media he was owed \$12,000 superannuation and up to \$100,000 in redundancy payments.

The print workers, who are mainly members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and have maintained a picket outside the plant since March 19, have accused Paragon Printing director Amir Hyster of asset-stripping the company. Last week workers rallied outside a meeting of Paragon Printing creditors and on Monday a group of 20 workers marched to local Liberal MP Bill Tilley's office to demand that he intervene to save their jobs.

Munitions workers strike in Victoria

Around 450 employees at the Benalla and Mulwala plants of defence equipment manufacturer Thales struck for 24 hours on March 24, after six months of negotiations for a new collective agreement stalled. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and three other unions want a 12 percent wage rise over three years, a penalty rate increase from 15 percent to 17 percent for afternoon and night shifts, and

wages and conditions for contract workers on par with full-time employees.

The company has rejected most of these claims and wants to extend the period of work before a meal break from five to six hours, and make access to paid sick leave entitlements more difficult to obtain for workers with long-term illness or injury.

Munitions workers planned to impose a ban on overtime and call-backs commencing yesterday and a four-hour strike on March 30. An AMWU spokesman said there were six major issues that need to be resolved.

New Zealand: Union signs deal in Ministry of Justice pay dispute

The Public Service Association (PSA) announced on March 22 that it had reached an agreement with the Ministry of Justice on a proposed pay deal. Neither the PSA nor the Ministry have released any details. Ongoing industrial action begun in October by 1,700 PSA members employed in courts across the country has been suspended while members vote on the deal at meetings during April.

The deal ends a deadlock over an imposed wage freeze by the Ministry on its employees. According to the union, court workers are paid up to 9 percent below the average of other public sector employees.

New Zealand: Waikato Hospital orderlies strike

Seventy-five orderlies at Waikato Hospital held a two-day strike, beginning March 24, to protest the Waikato District Health Board's (WDHB) wage freeze. The Unite Union has accused the WDHB of breaking the law by refusing to attend mediation and using replacement labour during the walk out. According to workers, the untrained strike breakers pose a health risk to patients and other employees by not following health and safety procedures.

New Zealand medical laboratory workers vote for industrial action

On March 16 laboratory workers in Auckland and Northland hospitals and at the Blood Service voted 80 percent in favour of industrial action over a pay freeze. The Medical Laboratory Workers Union has been in negotiations with 13 of the country's 21 District Health Boards (DHBs) and with the Blood Service for five collective agreements covering around 800 workers. Members in other regions will vote on the nil pay offer later this month. The union wants pay increases of between 2 and 5 percent.

New Zealand radiographers strike over pay freeze

Around 900 radiographers, members of the Association of Professional and Executive Employees (Apex), began national strike action at New Zealand hospitals on March 22. The rolling strikes escalate work-to-rule industrial action, which began at 20 District Health Boards in late February after radiographers rejected a zero percent pay rise. Apex is calling for an increase of 3 percent.

Aged-care workers vote to strike

On March 24, 60 caregivers and nursing staff at the Aubert Home of Compassion (AHC) in Wanganui held a two-hour stop-work meeting and lunchtime protest over the AHC's offer to freeze wages or cut leave entitlements. Service and Food Workers Union and New Zealand Nurses Organisation members have also voted to hold a 24-hour strike on April 6.

The unions, which have been in negotiations with the AHC for nine months, say the company has offered a wage increase, but only if staff employed for seven years surrender one week of long-service leave.

Emergency call centre workers protest redundancy

Workers laid off by Telecom New Zealand's emergency service call centre contractor Sitel picketed the company's Palmerston North office on March 23. The 32 Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU) members were laid off, with no redundancy pay, after Telecom decided to move the operation from Palmerston North to Wellington. Telecom has offered the staff positions in its Wellington call centre, but has not provided relocation costs.

Solomon Islands: Night club workers demand outstanding entitlements

Four cleaners and two kitchen workers recently laid off by the Aloha Night Club protested outside the office of the club's owner, Chris Fangs, on March 22 to demand redundancy payments and other outstanding entitlements. While Fangs claims that the shift workers had already been paid in full, the night club workers have referred the matter to the government's labour division.





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