

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

5 June 2010

The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Pakistan: Government teachers on hunger strike

Government teachers established hunger strike camps outside the Karachi Press Club on May 28 to demand the government implement an agreement reached in April over promotion and allowance claims dating back to 2007. The Government Secondary Teachers' Association and the Sindh Primary Teachers' Association said that teachers from different districts would visit the camp and participate in the hunger strike until the government accepted their demands.

The teachers are also protesting over a brutal police attack on several hundred government teachers who were attempting to submit a memorandum to the Governor's House on May 27. The teachers want their pay and conditions brought into line with other states were attacked by police in full riot gear using teargas, water cannon and batons. Over 30 teachers were injured and dozens arrested.

Teachers throughout Sindh state have held protests to condemn the police attack. The Sindh Government College Principals' Association has also demanded an inquiry into the incident.

Punjab health workers demonstrate

Over 2,000 Punjab Integrated Primary Health Care Model Program (PIPHCM) employees demonstrated in Bahawalpur on May 28 over non-payment of their salaries since November. They told the media that they were "starving" but no one was "paying heed" to their plight.

The PIPHCM was launched in 12 Punjab districts in 2007 to reduce infant and maternal mortality and to improve education for children with physical and mental impairments.

Pakistani university workers protest

Five hundred All Pakistan Clerks Association members from the Lahore University of Health Sciences (UHS) held a protest march from the Punjab Assembly to the Lahore High Court on May 31 to demand regularisation of their services for grades 1 to 15. Workers also claim that the UHS administration has terminated the services of protesting employees.

UHS non-regular employees began industrial action on May 29 and set up a hunger camp outside the university after they were locked out for rejecting new five-year contracts. Workers claimed the contracts violate the Punjab government's orders to "abolish contract policy" in the province. Although the workers have not received any salary since the lockout they vowed to continue protesting until their demands are met.

India: Municipal workers protest

Municipal street cleaners and garbage collectors began a series of protests over wages and jobs in key Indian cities last week.

On May 31, over 1,000 civic workers marched through Mysore City, Karnataka to the municipal commissioner's office. The workers want abolition of the contract system for pourakarmikas (sweepers and garbage collectors), equal pay for same work, health coverage and education facilities for their children.

On June 1, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions and affiliated unions held a rally outside the Gulbarga City Corporation office, Karnataka, in support of a four-week protest by pourakarmikas who are demanding payment of wage arrears outstanding for the last three years.

On the same day over 2,000 municipal labourers protested outside Bombay Municipal Corporation's head office to demand payment of leave in arrears for two years. The temporary workers claim they are owed 42 days paid leave and that some workers are not being paid the minimum wage.

Nearly 6,000 Mumbai municipal labourers only receive a 180-rupee (\$US4.00) minimum daily wage. The Kachra Vahtuk Shramik Sangh, which organised the protest, told the media that if the workers' appeals were ignored they would strike.

Queensland private school teachers strike

On June 3, over 350 teachers from four south-east Queensland private schools walked off the job and rallied outside the Presbyterian and Methodist Schools Association's Brisbane office over a pay dispute.

Queensland Independent Education Union spokesman Terry Burke said teachers want pay parity with colleagues in the non-government sector and a fixed schedule of work hours. The Presbyterian and Methodist Schools Association has refused to concede on both claims. Burke said the main issue was about pay rates for the most experienced teachers. He claimed they were receiving about \$2,000 less a year than teachers in comparable schools.

The 250 teachers attending the Brisbane rally voted for further industrial

action if negotiations next week fail.

New South Wales meat workers locked out

At least 60 employees from the Rivalea meat processing plant in Corowa, New South Wales have been locked out following a seven-day strike. The Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU) members walked out on May 27 over failed negotiations for a new work agreement. The AMIEU wants an 8 percent pay rise over two years and back pay to February 28. Management is offering 7 percent over two years and no back pay. Negotiations have been resumed.

Rivalea is owned by QAF Limited, which is listed in the Singapore stock exchange, has meat processing plants and stock feed distribution units throughout the world.

Victorian door manufacturer workers locked out

Police and security guards were used to enforce a three-day lockout of 40 workers at Spence Doors in the Melbourne suburb of Cheltenham after they threatened to take industrial action over a wage claim on May 28. Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union members were demanding a 5 percent annual wage rise over three years. The company has offered a 3 percent pay increase and backdated a 2 percent wage rise to January this year.

The company, which produces doors for government buildings, has significantly increased its income under the federal Labor government's "Building Education Revolution" stimulus package. A union spokesman told the media: "A fair share should come back to the loyal employees. They shouldn't be treated like this—confronted by police and security guards—when they have turned up to do an honest day's work."

Western Australian power workers maintain bans

Two hundred workers from the state-owned Collie Muja Power Station, south of Perth, are defying a Fair Work Australia return to work order and are maintaining bans at three of the four areas of the plant over asbestos contamination concerns. Verve Energy, which runs the plant, has conducted air monitoring and claims the power station is safe. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members have demanded that the company fund an independent monitor to conduct swab tests.

Workers also want imported parts tested after asbestos dust was found on flange gaskets being used in the multi-million dollar overhaul of one of the ageing coal-fired power station's units.

Northern Territory work-for-the-dole recipients demonstrate

Indigenous workers from Kalkaringi, about 500 kilometres south-east of Katherine in the Northern Territory, protested in Darwin this week. Employed under the federal government's work-for-the-dole program, the workers claim they are being forced to work up to 30 hours per week on

construction sites for a Basics (food) card and Centrelink money totalling about \$195 per week.

Thousands of indigenous workers are employed on similar conditions throughout Australia under the government's work-for-the-dole program. Kalkaringi elder Peter Inverway told the media that workers in his community were told that unless they accepted these working conditions they would have their Centrelink welfare payments cut.

New Zealand hospital workers strike

Around 300 employees, including orderlies and cleaners, of the international property management firm OCS at seven hospitals throughout New Zealand struck for two days on June 3 to protest the contractor's pay freeze. The action by Service and Food Workers Union (SFWU) members follows almost a year of pay negotiations. The SFWU wants a pay rise of 2 percent back-dated to April—the same increase offered by District Health Boards and contractors as part of a collective agreement covering almost 50,000 public hospital workers.

Wood processing workers begin industrial action

One hundred workers at Juken New Zealand triboard mill in Kaitaia began a work-to-rule and overtime ban this week after rejecting a pay increase offer of just 1.75 percent over an 18-month period. National Distribution Union (NDU) and Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union members want a 3.5 percent increase over the same period. An NDU spokesman said members were prepared to strike to win their demands.

Power-line engineers begin industrial action

Eighty engineers at Electrix, a contractor for Auckland's Vector power-line network, began industrial action on June 2. The work-to-rule action, which includes a ban on overtime, callout and standby arrangements, was called to oppose the company's proposal to freeze wages until the end of 2012.

Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union spokesman Joe Gallagher said Electrix also wanted to cut the value of the employer's superannuation contribution from 6 percent down to 2 percent. Gallagher accused Electrix of trying to "drive down terms and conditions in our industry" by using less skilled contractors on lower wages.

Papua New Guinea magistrates and court workers strike

Village magistrates, court clerks and other court officials in PNG's Central Province began strike action this week to protest the non-payment of entitlements. The 997 officials, who are employed at courts in the Goilala, Kairuku-Hiri, Abau and Rigo districts, say they are owed 140,000 kina (\$US50,570) for 2009 and have not received any pay for the first quarter of 2010.

A group of magistrates and other officials representing court workers are holding talks with Courts Southern Regional Manager and Justice Department officials.



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