

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

21 August 2010

## India: Bihar university non-teaching staff strike in ninth week

Over 33,000 non-teaching employees at nine universities and 250 colleges in Patna are currently defying a Bihar state government order to end strike action that began on July 1. Strikers have turned down an offer by the government to repeal suspensions of strikers if they return to work. The walkout has affected teaching and admissions at all the universities and colleges.

Non-teaching staff are demanding wage rises and other benefits promised by the state government in 2005. These include Union Grants Commission pay scales, assured-career promotion benefits and the representation of non-teaching staff in university senates and syndicates.

Bihar State University and College Employees Federation members this week burned effigies of the government's pay scale report, declaring that the government wants to divide non-teaching employees by recommending different pay scales for college and university staff.

## Uttar Pradesh non-teaching workers protest

Non-teaching staff at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) demonstrated at the Kanpur campus on August 16 to demand permanent status for daily wage workers and for the administration to honour a previous agreement to issue new promotion guidelines for employees commencing July 1. Protesters, including union members, daily wage workers and hostel mess workers, threatened to strike on August 23 if their demands are not met.

## Cochin port workers strike

Workers at the Rajiv Gandhi Container Terminal in Cochin, Kerala struck for 72 hours on August 16 and demonstrated at the India Gateway Terminal Limited office to oppose the possible loss of 10,000 jobs if operations at the port are transferred to the newly-built International Container Transshipment Terminal at Vallarpadam. The strike was called after two rounds of discussion between ten port unions and the regional labour office failed to resolve their concerns. Workers want the Cochin terminal to remain operating after the Vallarpadam terminal is commissioned.

## Indian sales and medical representatives walk out

Over 1,000 members of the Maharashtra Sales and Medical Representatives Association (MSMRA) struck for two days on August 17 and demonstrated at the Assistant Labour Commissioner's office in Nagpur to demand an 8-hour working day and implementation of the Sales Promotion Employees Act (SPEA). The association said only three states, Uttaranchal, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal, are implementing the SPEA.

MSMRA said the drug industry has been violating labour laws, which include requirements to give appointment letters and maintain service and leave registers, for a long time.

## Andhra Pradesh municipal contract workers strike

Kadapa Municipal contractual workers, including water works, parks, street lighting and bill collectors, walked off the job on August 17 for a one-day hunger strike to demand a raise in monthly minimum pay from 4,000 rupees (\$US89) to 7,100 rupees. Municipal Workers and Employees Union members demonstrated at the municipal offices to issue a 23-point charter of demands, which include disbursement of salaries of employees pending for the last three months and provident fund accounts for permanent employees, allotment of house sites to contractual workers, retirement benefits to those retiring prior to April 1, 2010, regularisation of contract workers, weekly holidays and casual leave.

## Sri Lankan tile workers on strike

Inter Company Employees Union members at tile manufacturer Lanka Tiles walked off the job on August 12 for an indefinite period after six months of talks for a new collective agreement reached a deadlock. The workers' demands have not been reported.

## Cambodian garment workers plan mass strike

Over 60,000 garment workers have put their thumbprints on a union petition calling for a mass week-long strike on September 13. The Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC) called the strike after the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training and the Garment Manufacturers Association refused its demand to renegotiate the new minimum wage structure to be implemented on October 1.

In July, the Free Trade Union of Workers, a union representing over

130,000 garment employees, dropped previous demands for a 53 percent minimum wage rise. It accepted a \$US5 monthly increase offered by the Labour Advisory Committee, a body made up of government officials and industry representatives. The rise means the minimum monthly wage will be \$61, far below the \$93 workers were demanding. The CLC and other smaller unions are demanding that the minimum wage be set at \$95.

### **Cambodian construction workers on strike**

Up to 40 construction workers from KC Gecin Enterprises in Kandal province walked off the job on August 16 to demand reinstatement of 27 colleagues fired for trying to organise a union. Strikers are maintaining a picket at the company's main office in Phnom Penh despite having their placards destroyed by police.

KC Gecin Enterprises employs over 160 construction workers in Kandal province, whom the Building and Wood Workers Trade Union of Cambodia has been attempting to organise into a union.

### **Philippine Airline cabin crew to strike**

The Flight Attendants and Stewards Association of the Philippines, covering 1,600 Philippine Airlines (PAL) cabin crew, this week issued a notice for a strike in two weeks' time after ten months of negotiations for a new work agreement reached a deadlock. The association said it would not sign a collective bargaining agreement or agree to any more meetings unless its demand to raise the mandatory retirement age of 40 was taken up, and a "reasonable" salary increase was offered. Association vice president Andy Ortega said the retirement age is discriminatory, since ground crew can work until age 65.

Another union, the PAL Employees Association, comprising the carrier's ground employees, has already filed a notice of strike with the Labor Department over the company's plan to spin off its non-core units and retire 2,600 employees.

### **Malaysian electronics workers end mass protest**

A three-day protest by more than 5,000 foreign workers at an electronics factory in Johor Baru industrial area over the death of a Nepali worker ended on August 17. A four-point agreement was reached between the manufacturer, contract employers and workers, under the mediation of Nepal's embassy. According to fellow Nepali workers, Karna Bahadur Gharti Magar of Rolpa died on Sunday inside the JCY SDB BHD factory due to a delay in his treatment caused by company negligence.

The Nepali ambassador said employers agreed to provide compensation of 10,000 ringgits (\$US3,125) to the dead man's family. The employers also agreed to provide a minimum salary of 546 ringgits per month along with an ambulance service for emergency cases and prompt treatment for all workers at a clinic on the factory premises. Nepali workers have been complaining that the company has been providing only 428 ringgits as salary, violating a labour agreement.

### **Xstrata miners in Queensland suspend strike**

On August 14, 200 workers at Xstrata's Collinsville coal mine in north Queensland suspended strike action to allow resumption of talks over a pay dispute. The strike had begun on July 27. Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members, who are employed by Thiess, had previously rejected an offer for a 6 percent pay rise to be followed by 4 percent annual increases for the next three years. The union wants a 9 percent rise to be followed by 6 percent and 5 percent increases, with superannuation contributions lifted to 12 percent. Thiess has made a new offer, which CFMEU members will vote on by this weekend. Contents of the offer have not been made public. Western Australian rail ticket inspectors resume action

Up to 100 revenue protection officers, employed by MSS Security, who check tickets and issue fines on Perth's trains, stopped checking tickets and collecting revenue for three days during peak hours from August 17. Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) members walked off the job for two days earlier this month over the dispute.

LHMU members have not had a pay rise for over two years and want 5 percent annual pay increases for three years with 18 months' back pay. Other demands include additional training and the removal of penalty rate anomalies. MSS has offered the Fair Work Australia minimum wage increase of \$26 per week, which the workers are entitled to anyway, and a 1.4 percent rise for the first year and a 3 percent annual increase for the next two years.

### **South Australian nurses begin industrial action**

Nurses and midwives in South Australia's public hospitals began industrial action over a new work agreement on August 17 by shutting down a computer system used to calculate staffing levels. The Nursing and Midwifery Federation's Elizabeth Dabars said a pay rise offer of up to 15 percent over three years has been accepted but a dispute over staffing is unresolved. Dabars said the government's proposed enterprise agreement fails to address staffing levels, skills mix and professional development.

### **South Australian university academics strike**

Academic staff at the University of South Australia's Adelaide campus walked out for 24 hours on August 16 as part of their salary and conditions dispute. It is the third stoppage by academics this month. The National Tertiary Education Union has been in negotiation for two years for improved working conditions and job security for casual staff. The union also wants an improvement on the 18 percent pay rise offer over three years.

### **New Zealand bus drivers accept pay deal**

Workers at GO Wellington and Valley Flyer bus services have reached an agreement with NZ Bus following months of pay negotiations and strike action. Wellington Tramways Union members have accepted an

11.5 percent pay increase on their hourly rate and allowances until the end of 2012. Hutt Valley drivers will also be paid time-and-a-half for working weekends, which GO Wellington employees already receive.

However, no progress has been made with the employers of the Mana-Newlands drivers, who plan to strike for two hours during the afternoon peak period on Friday August 20.

### **NZ laboratory workers reject pay offer**

Around 1,000 medical laboratory workers at 13 District Hospital Boards (DHB) and NZ Blood Services are continuing industrial action after rejecting the employers' latest pay offer of a 1 percent pay rise now and another 1 percent in January. Three DHBs had been standing down up to 30 laboratory workers for six hours each day from August 6 for taking industrial action, which includes not answering phones and a ban on some tests.

The New Zealand Medical Laboratory Workers Union has said it is seeking pay increases of up to 5 percent at different DHBs.



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