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*.

India: Andhra Pradesh university staff strike

English and Foreign Language University (EFLU) employees in Hyderabad have been on strike for over a week to demand implementation of a promotion scheme recommended by the Sixth Pay Commission. Talks called on September 27 aimed at ending the strike concluded with a stalemate. The industrial action is being organised by a joint action committee of non-academic and technical staff at the university.

Taiwan private school teachers demonstrate

Thousands of private school teachers protested for more than two hours outside the Presidential Office in Taipei on September 26 to demand improved retirement benefits. A National Teachers Association official told demonstrators that private teachers had the worst retirement system in Taiwan.

The teachers want the government to honour an earlier agreement to pass legislation allowing private school teachers to transfer their insurance out of the PSTI (Public Servants and Teachers Insurance) to Labor Insurance, which provides improved benefits.

Philippine Airlines union breaks off negotiations

The Flight Attendants and Stewards Association of the Philippines (Fasap), which represents 1,600 members at the state-owned Philippine Airlines (PAL), broke off talks with PAL management over wages and conditions this week, accusing it of repeatedly rejecting the union's demands. A key sticking point is over retirement age. PAL insists that female workers hired after 1996 retire at 45 years of age and those employed after 2000 at 40. Fasap wants the retirement age lifted to 60.

Fasap has filed a strike notice with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). But under the direction of the Philippines president, DOLE has threatened to "assume jurisdiction" of the dispute if Fasap members strike. This would make the industrial action illegal.

Western Australian hospital workers escalate bans

Up to 8,000 public hospital support employees—orderlies, cleaners, patient care assistants, catering staff and sterilisation workers—this week escalated work-to-rule action with bans on moving linen and rubbish, clearing meal trays, and equipment sterilisation for private hospitals. The work bans have been imposed indefinitely.

Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) members have been in dispute with the state Liberal government for over three months over a new work agreement. LHMU members want a 15-18 percent pay rise over three years, which equates to a $50 weekly pay rise for most workers who earn below $40,000 a year.

Workers rejected the government's latest offer of a 6 percent pay increase over two years but with trade-offs, including the removal of anti-privatisation clauses in their agreement.

Workers claim the government wants to privatise catering and cleaning services at new hospitals under construction and to place new employees at existing facilities on temporary and fixed-term contracts.

The state government has begun moves to take the dispute to the Industrial Relations Commission.

South Australian public servants demonstrate

Hundreds of South Australian government employees rallied on the steps of state parliament in Adelaide on September 28 to oppose the axing of over 3,700 government jobs, elimination of loading payments on annual leave, and cuts to long-service leave

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entitlements. The Public Service Association called the demonstration to coincide with a parliamentary debate on the state budget.

SA Unions secretary Janet Giles told demonstrators that the protest was the first step in an ongoing campaign to “stop the government legislating away already agreed upon award entitlements”. The union, however, has refused to mobilise its membership to fight previous state sector job cuts.

Victorian rural council workers impose bans

Warrnambool City Council outdoor maintenance workers have banned working overtime, lawn mowing and rubbish collection in a dispute over wages. The rural council has offered a 4 percent pay rise and a minimum increase of $36 a week, back-dated to July. Australian Services Union (ASU) members want the weekly minimum offer lifted an extra $4 for the first year and $6 for the following two years.

An ASU spokesperson claimed that some workers in the lower wage bracket earned almost $100 a week less than those at other councils in similar jobs. The union had planned a lunchtime rally at the council office on September 30 before resuming talks with management in the afternoon.

Xstrata Tahmoor miners reach agreement

A long-running dispute between the multi-national mining company Xstrata and 250 workers at its New South Wales southern highlands operation at Tahmoor ended this week with the company and miners finalising a new work agreement. The two-year dispute involved strikes, pickets, work bans and a lockout.

Xstrata had insisted that miners’ demands for a pay rise, improved annual leave and the maintenance of existing manning levels would make the mine unviable. A key sticking point was the workers’ demand that existing permanent employees not be replaced by contractors.

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy (CFMEU) claim that the deal grants wages parity with surrounding mines and improved job security for permanent employees. The union, however, has not released full details of the agreement.

Queensland Health workers stop work

About 100 clinicians from the allied health, pathology and medical imaging sectors at the Rockhampton Hospital in North Queensland held a one-hour stop-work meeting on September 30. The action is part of a statewide campaign by 6,000 health professionals for an improved pay deal. The state Labor government has refused to increase its offer of 2.5 percent per year over the next three years.

Public Sector Union members want one 4.5 percent and two 4 percent rises over three years with all allowances and extra leave maintained. Workers have imposed statewide administrative bans for the past three weeks and plan to escalate action to include statewide one-hour stoppages next week.

New Zealand ministry of education workers strike

Ministry of Education workers held two-hour national stop-work meetings in New Zealand on Thursday. The Public Servants Association (PSA) claims that the ministry’s pay system is “arbitrary”. Last year, ministry managers were awarded over half a million dollars in bonuses while the pay of PSA members was frozen. The union has been in talks with the government for year to demand a more progressive pay system.

New Zealand actors boycott *The Hobbit*

The Australian-based Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) has called on actors to boycott production of *The Hobbit*, which is currently being shot in New Zealand. The MEAA wants a collective contract for members of Actor’s Equity NZ involved in the multi-million dollar movie. The call has received support from the International Federation of Actors, whose member unions are active in the US, UK and Canada.

Films shot in New Zealand have not previously been unionised and actors’ contracts have no minimum guarantees of wages or working conditions, no cancellation payments, and no payment for future broadcasts. The film’s executive producer, Sir Peter Jackson, has responded to the proposed boycott by threatening to move the production to Eastern Europe. Jackson dubbed the MEAA an “Australian bully boy” and refused to meet with union representatives.

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