

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.

Bangladesh: Postal workers on strike

At least 24,000 non-permanent Bangladeshi postal department workers walked off the job for 12 days on October 9 over a charter of demands. Bangladesh Postal Extra-Departmental Workers' Union members also struck for 12 days in July over the same issues, affecting mail services at 8,500 rural post offices and over 600 extra-departmental sub-post offices in metro Khulna.

The union wants payment of festival, travel and outfit allowances, permanent appointment after five years' service and the basic wage increased to between 3,200 and 4,500 taka (\$US64.30) a month. The postal department has offered to increase the allowance for postmen to 3,000 taka and cleaners and security guards to 2,050 taka.

The union has threatened to call an indefinite strike on December 6 if its demands are not met.

Chittagong port workers strike

Dock Bandar Sramik Karmachari Federation (DBSKF) members at the government-run Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) struck on October 11 and picketed several berths operated by private companies recently contracted by the port authority. The private operators have refused to employ CPA workers.

DBCKF members want the six private berth operators' contracts cancelled and the reemployment of thousands of workers retrenched since 2007 when the dock management board was dissolved by the then caretaker government.

After port workers took strike action in August over the issue, the CPA 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 its plans to privatise the facility.

Union officials called off industrial action after 12 hours, following flimsy assurances by CPA (the third time in 13 months) that it will reinstate the retrenched workers, issue identity cards and urge the private operators to hire CPA employees.

India: Striking Foxconn workers arrested

On October 10, police imprisoned 320 striking workers who had been occupying the Foxconn factory in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu. Two officials of the Confederation of India Trade Unions (CITU) were also arrested when they intervened on behalf of the arrested workers. The striking workers want reinstatement of 23 suspended colleagues, higher wages and recognition of their union Foxconn India Thozilalar Sangam (FITS), which is affiliated with CITU.

FITS, which claims a membership of around 1,500 out of the 1,800 regular Foxconn workers, told management on September 8 that it wanted wage negotiations. Management refused to negotiate and entered into an agreement with Foxconn India Thozhilalar Munnetra Sangam (FITMS), a union affiliated to the Labor Progressive Front, which is aligned with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam or DMK. The DMK is part of the Tamil Nadu coalition government and has openly sided with management in all workers' disputes in the state.

FITS members walked out on September 23. Management immediately sacked 23 union delegates and called in police who arrested over 1,000 striking workers. Striking FITS members reoccupied the factory on September 27.

Tamil Nadu police baton-charge NLC workers

About 1,000 striking contract workers from the state-owned Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC) were viciously assaulted by baton-wielding police as they picketed NLC buses on October 9. Around 300 workers were arrested. On October 1, over 2,000 striking NLC employees were arrested while picketing a power station as part of a strike by 13,000 NLC contract workers.

Workers walked off the job on September 19 to demand regular employment, bonuses and equal pay for equal work. The strike was called by the Pattali Thozhilalar Sangam and the Jeeva Contract Labourers Union.

Last Sunday a five-year agreement was signed by the Labour Progressive Front (LPF) and the NLC Contractors' Association. The agreement includes a 1,040 rupee (\$US23.40) per month wage rise, payment of three months' arrears and a paid holiday benefit for only nine days. The unions' original pay demand was for a 2,600 rupee monthly increase, excluding Sunday work. At least six unions have rejected the LPF agreement and are continuing to strike.

Tamil Nadu tyre workers on strike

Workers at Madras Rubber Factory (MRF) plants in Arakkonam, Puducherry and Thiruvottiyur, Tamil Nadu have been on strike since October 10 to demand an end to contract labour. The three MRF plants produce a total of over 76,000 truck tyres and 25,000 tubes each day.

The strike began after management at Arakkonam reportedly employed contract labourers to do the work normally done by permanent employees.

Meghalaya deficit school teachers on strike

Over 2,400 teachers of deficit or charity-managed schools in Meghalaya walked off the job indefinitely on October 11 to demand pay arrears as per the Meghalaya Fourth Pay Commission. The Khasi Jaintia Deficit School Teachers Association and Garo Hills Deficit School Teachers and Employees Association members struck for 24 hours on September 13 over the same issue.

The associations have accused the government of failing to honour an agreement made in April to release 40 percent of arrears by June. The teachers have not received their monthly salaries for June, July and August.

The Education Commission claims that the government does not have the 520 million rupees (\$US11.7 million) needed to pay the arrears of all the state's teacher workforce.

Filipino plantation workers walk out

Up to 1,400 workers on one of Philippines' largest palm oil plantations in the Agusan del Sur region, Mindanao have defied a Department of Labor and Employment no-strike order and walked off the job on October 7 over failed talks for a collective bargaining agreement (CBA). Filipinas

Palm Oil Industries Inc. (FPII) employs 1,000 workers on its 8,000-hectare plantation but only 400 have regular status. The rest are either contractual or casual employees who are paid lower than the prescribed minimum daily wage rate of 225 pesos (\$US5.07).

The National Federation of Labor Unions (NAFLU) originally demanded a 150-peso pay increase in the CBA but reduced it by half after the company refused to increase its 4-peso offer. Workers are also demanding night differential pay and hospital insurance.

NAFLU claimed FPII is also refusing to negotiate a new CBA with employees at its Libis plant in Metro Manila.

Thai seafood processing workers on strike

Burmese migrant workers at the Dechanpanich Fishing Net Factory in Khon Kaen, Thailand have stopped work for the second time in a month over the illegal withholding of their work documents by the employer. In September, 1,000 immigrant workers ended a seven-day strike after management agreed to return their employment visas and other work-related documents.

The strike was sparked after six sacked workers found their returned documents had been tampered with by management, which prevented them from working for other Thai employers.

Dechanpanich returned the documents of 569 employees but the workers have refused to leave the factory compound and are demanding 3,000 baht (\$US100) in unpaid wages and a letter of release from management so they can find work elsewhere. The company claims it is entitled under Thai law to sue the workers if they refuse to leave the factory. At least 370 employees have not had their documents returned.

Melbourne casino union calls off strike

The Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) has called off yesterday's planned strike at Crown, Australia's largest gambling casino, after reaching an in-principle agreement for a new work agreement. While LHMU Victorian secretary Jess Walsh claimed it was a "fantastic outcome", the deal falls far short of workers' original demands.

The agreement will deliver a 12 percent pay increase over three years, just 0.75 percent above Crown's original offer and less than the 13.5 percent demanded by the casino workers. Members are yet to vote on the deal.

A key sticking point in negotiations has been Crown's plan to change the pay arrangements for senior dealers, effectively cutting their pay by almost \$5,000 a year. While this issue has not been resolved the union has agreed that its members should "participate in a review of the career structure of croupiers with Crown."

Crown has just announced a \$292 million profit, is spending \$450 million upgrading and expanding the casino, and recently awarded its CEO a 6.9 percent pay increase bringing his annual income up to \$2.9 million.

Western Australian hospital support workers resume industrial action

Health support workers at public hospitals throughout Western Australia have overwhelmingly rejected the state government's latest pay offer of 10.5 percent over three years. An estimated 8,000 Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) members walked off the job for four hours on October 12 and have re-imposed bans on the removal of rubbish, linen, meal trays and the sterilisation of hospital equipment for private hospitals.

More than 700 LHMU members protested at Parliament House in Perth while those at regional hospitals collected signatures on petitions opposing privatisation. The government wants to remove anti-privatisation clauses in the new award, which will allow it to outsource their jobs to contractors.

Hospital workers are demanding a 15-18 percent pay rise over three years. Many of the workers earn less than \$40,000 per year and face steep increases in household electricity, gas and water charges imposed in the state budget handed down in May this year. The dispute was due to be heard in the Industrial Relations Commission this week.

Alcoa workers in Western Australia stop work

More than 700 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members at a stop-work meeting in Pinjarra (90 km south of Perth) on October 1 voted to reject the latest offer from Alcoa in their 18-month dispute with the company over a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement. The striking workers from Alcoa's southwest mines and refineries at Kwinana, Wagerup, Huntly, Willowdale, Bunbury Port and Marrinup voted to begin industrial action.

The AWU told the media it will begin industrial action this week but said that under the Gillard government's Fair Work Act it will have to provide Alcoa with 24 hours notice.

Alcoa's proposed EBA guarantees employment for current workers, a minimum number of overtime shifts and up to 17.5 percent remuneration increases over the next three years but includes trade-offs.

New Zealand power workers vote to strike

Forty engineers, fitters and other workers employed by contractor United Group (UGL) on Transpower's North Island \$824-million, 186 km line power grid upgrade, are preparing for industrial action on October 26.

The Engineering Manufacturing and Printing Union (EPMU) "strike notice" came after talks with UGL broke down over the large pay gap between New Zealand and Australian workers on the project. The union claims that the 70 Australian workers on the project are paid up to three times more than their New Zealand counterparts.

An EPMU official said action would begin with a ban on overtime, callouts and standby arrangements. Both sides have agreed to reenter negotiations on October 21.

New Zealand secondary school teachers suspend strike

The Post-Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) called off strike action planned this week over a new work contract following assurances from the Ministry of Education that it will make an improved offer. Fresh negotiations were due to begin on October 13. Teachers had planned rolling stoppages between now and the end of December due to an unfavourable response from the government following their national strike in September.

The PPTA wants a 4 percent pay increase in a new work contract and a commitment by the Ministry of Education to address increasing class sizes through teacher retention and recruitment. Teachers have rejected the government's 1.5 percent pay rise, with an additional 1 percent after 12 months with the claw-back of conditions.

French Polynesia university teachers and students strike

Over 250 students and 30 teachers at the University of French Polynesia took unprecedented strike action and marched in Tahiti on October 9 in protest against austerity measures at the university. Several courses, including teaching and English, are to be axed under the planned cuts. The teachers and students told the media that university administration was pushing them into a "climate of fear" and threatened more protests.

Last week a series of strike notices were issued by public sector employees in the town of Teva I Uta after the local authorities announced plans to cut government service provisions. According to *Tahitipresse*, the union, O Oe To Oe Rima, planned to take industrial action in the fuel supply sector on Wednesday. Other areas that could be targeted are gas and electricity companies.



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