Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

19 March 2011

Pakistani doctors remain on strike

Members of the Young Doctors Association (YDA) who walked off the job at three government hospitals in Rawalpindi on March 8 said they would remain on strike until their demands are met. The doctors are protesting the Punjab government's failure to honour an agreement it made in January to increase salaries by 100 percent. The YDA is also demanding that the National Accountability Bureau vacate the girls' hostel, which the bureau has occupied for over a year.

YDA members are providing free medical care in the streets and in temporary shelters in hospital grounds while negotiations with the government are in progress.

India: Uttar Pradesh sanitary workers strike

Allahabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) sanitary workers struck on Tuesday to demand payment of arrears under the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations and outstanding wages for the past six months.

The strikers claimed that sanitary staff at other Punjab municipal corporations receive 120 rupees ($US2.70) per day but AMC only pays contract sanitary workers 100 rupees. After evening talks with municipal leaders failed, workers decided to remain on strike until their demands were met.

Sri Lankan flight attendants protest

Sri Lankan Airlines flight attendants began wearing white armbands on Monday to call for a series of outstanding demands. The Flight Attendants Union (FAU) wants the company to end recruitment of contract staff, the removal of rules banning contract flight attendants from marrying and an end to intimidation by lower level management. The FAU has demanded that the airline immediately enter into talks or strike action will be called.

Burmese shoe manufacturing workers strike

Over 1,500 employees at the Tai Yi shoe factory in Burma's capital Rangoon began indefinite strike action and a sit-down protest outside the factory on March 9 to demand a pay rise. A large contingent of police has surrounded the factory since the strike erupted.

Employees are currently paid $US0.06 an hour or 72 cents for a 12-hour day. The shoe workers have rejected a one cent per hour increase from management and said they would not return to work until they received eight cents an hour. They also want their working hours cut.

In January, Tai Yi workers protested for a reduction of working hours. The company agreed not to force employees to work on holidays but insisted that they had to work until 8 p.m. on other days. In February, however, factory officials forced employees to remain at work until 9 p.m. Normal working hours are from 7:20 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Philippine Airlines and union begin talks

Philippine Airlines (PAL) began negotiations on Monday with the PAL Employees Association (PALEA), which represents nearly 3,000 ground crew and administrative employees. The talks follow a notice of strike issued through the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) by the union.

PALEA had accused the airline of refusing to negotiate on a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) it submitted six months ago. PAL said it would not enter talks until its temporarily halted staff restructure proposals were implemented. The union estimates that over 2,600 jobs will be outsourced.

The meeting, mediated by DOLE, ended on the same day with PAL agreeing to submit a CBA counterproposal by March 28 at the latest.

Australian research scientists strike

Nearly 100 workers at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's (CSIRO) Australian Animal Health Laboratory and the Belmont laboratory in East Geelong, Victoria stopped work for several hours on Tuesday over stalled enterprise bargaining negotiations. The action was part of a series of national strikes for an improved work agreement that includes an annual pay rise, redundancy payouts and calls for improved staff consultation. A CSIRO Staff Association official said that more than 2,000 members would participate in a series of two-hour stoppages in Victoria and

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New South Wales during the week.

Association members are demanding a 4.6 percent annual pay rise but CSIRO management is holding out for a 3 percent per annum increase over three to four years. Two other unions involved—the Community and Public Sector Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union—have indicated, however, that they are willing to negotiate for less than 4.6 percent. Negotiations have been ongoing for six months.

Western Australian industrial court orders health workers to lift bans

The Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) has ordered hundreds of public hospital support workers in Perth to lift work bans imposed last week. United Voice union members began industrial action in protest against the Western Australian government's plans to privatise a range of services at the new Fiona Stanley Hospital in the state capital's southern suburbs. The IRC order remains in place until April 4 and both the government and the union have been instructed to hold discussions to resolve the dispute.

Earlier this month, the state Liberal government announced it would sign a $3 billion-plus contract with SERCO to supply support services for the hospital, which is still under construction. Workers reject government claims that "anti-privatisation" clauses in a new work agreement signed by the United Voice union in October do not apply to new hospitals.

United Voice officials have ordered members to adhere to the IRC's decision and, in an attempt to contain health support workers' anger, launched a "public information" campaign and called for protests outside the parliamentary offices of Liberal Party politicians.

Victorian cemetery workers on strike

Australian Workers Union (AWU) members employed as gravediggers and gardeners at the Altona and Williamstown cemeteries in Melbourne walked off the job on March 10 to protest over staff shortages. Strikers were later joined by indoor workers who walked out in support. A union spokesperson said that workers were disheartened at management's refusal to hire sufficient staff to maintain decent standards. According to the union, ongoing negotiations with the General Melbourne Cemetery Trust had only produced half-hearted answers to workers problems.

New Zealand teachers' union accepts pay deal

High school teachers in New Zealand public schools will meet during the next two weeks and vote on a new pay offer. Teachers want a 4 percent pay rise and have held several strikes, including nation-wide walkouts, over the past six months. The government's last offer of 2.75 percent over two years, plus an $800 one-off payment was rejected by the Post-Primary Teachers Association (PPTA).

Details of the latest offer have not been released by the ministry of education or the PPTA. The union has ordered teachers to lift all work bans and sent clear signals that it intends to use the catastrophic earthquake that hit Christchurch last month to push through a sell-out deal. PPTA President Robin Duff told the media that in light of "the situation the country is in at present, it would be good to achieve a settlement and return to some sense of normality."

Papua New Guinea doctors threaten national strike

The National Doctors Association (NDA), representing over 500 doctors in public hospitals, has threatened to call a national stoppage over the government's failure to implement its 2009 Memorandum of Agreement on salaries and remunerations. Association officials have given the National Health Department and Department of Personnel Management until the end of the month to implement the agreement. According to the NDA, 97 percent of doctors have voted for strike action.

NDA members also want more doctors hired and are concerned about the loss of highly qualified doctors who are being employed on various mining and gas projects where pay and conditions are much better.

Solomon Island teachers threaten to strike

The Solomon Islands Teachers Association (SINTA), representing over 8,000 teachers, has threatened to call a national stoppage if the government fails to respond to its demands by March 24. A SINTA official claimed that over 6 percent of the country's teachers have not received their salary since last year and many more have not been paid boarding, extra-curricular, inducement and other basic allowances.

This week teachers in Honiara, the Solomon Islands' capital, received short pays or no pay at all for the second consecutive pay period. A Ministry of Education spokesman claimed that the government did not have enough money to "cater for all the teachers' salaries."

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