

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

16 April 2011

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

## India: Andhra Pradesh film production workers strike

Over 14,000 Telugu film industry workers struck for two days on April 8, halting production on 18 big-budget films to demand higher wages. This is the second time this year Telugu film workers have struck over salaries.

The Andhra Pradesh Film Industry Employees Federation (APFIEF) claims that its members have not had a wage increase since 2007. According to the federation, most workers, including junior artists, are paid between 350 and 365 rupees (\$US8.30) for a 12-hour day. While the Andhra Pradesh Film Chamber of Commerce offered a 35 percent wage increase at a meeting with the APFIEF on Saturday, workers' representatives continue to demand a 75 percent rise. Negotiations are continuing.

## Goa mosquito eradication workers on strike again

For the second time this year, the 59 contract workers in the malaria cell of the Directorate of Health Services (DHS) in Panaji, Goa are on strike. Members of the Malaria Workers Union walked off the job on April 7 and began a hunger strike at the DHS premises to demand regularisation of employment. One striker has become ill and had to be admitted to hospital.

The workers ended a strike in January after they were assured by health minister Vishwajit Rane that they would be "absorbed by the state government within 30 days." A union official told the media there has been "no development" on the issue. He said many workers have been employed with the malaria cell for the last 15 years.

## Karnataka pre-university teachers on strike

Pre-university (PU) lecturers across Karnataka have been on strike since April 8 to demand improved salaries and conditions. Thousands of striking lecturers gathered in Bangalore Freedom Park on April 10 and vowed to maintain strike action until their demands were met. The Karnataka State PUC Lecturers' Association wants equal salaries with degree college lecturers, more promotions, and better infrastructure to

improve academic performance.

The salary campaign was started jointly by pre-university and degree college lecturers 20 years ago. The government increased the pay scales of degree college lecturers 10 years ago, but not for PU lecturers.

## Air India pilots protest

Former Indian Airline (IA) pilots, now employed by Air India (AI) following the amalgamation of both airlines, have begun wearing black armbands to protest management's failure to address their grievances, including pay parity and similar working conditions with their AI colleagues.

Indian Commercial Pilots Association (ICPA) members were due to strike over the issues on March 19, but the Delhi High Court issued a restraining order, after management agreed to provide an interim relief package and address the pilots' concerns to the Civil Aviation Minister by March 31. Management, however, has not yet fulfilled this pledge.

## Punjab rural health workers protest

National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) employees demonstrated outside the office of the Civil Surgeon's office in Ludhiana on April 9 to demand regularisation of their jobs. The protesters held a procession to the Deputy Commissioner's office to submit a memorandum. According to the rural health workers, there are over 9,000 NRHM workers employed on a contract basis in Punjab.

## Bangladeshi power workers on strike

On Sunday, 250 outsourced workers from the Barapukuria Thermal Power Plant in Dinajpur walked off the job to protest the seven-day lockout of a union official. Barapukuria Power Plant Workers Union president Md Nuruzzaman was forced to leave the plant after an argument with management over the regularisation of workers.

Nuruzzaman had accused the chief engineer of not registering workers' demands for regularisation to the Power Development board by an April 7 deadline. Workers said they would remain on strike while Nuruzzaman remains locked out.

## **Australia: Qantas engineers vote for industrial action**

At least 80 percent of Qantas engineers who participated in a secret ballot have voted in favour of industrial action, including overtime bans, work-to-rule campaigns and full stoppages, in a dispute for a new work agreement. The Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers Association (ALAEA), which represents over 1,500 Qantas engineers, has assured Qantas, however, that it will minimise the impact of the industrial action and delay its implementation until after the busy Easter holiday period.

Engineers are demanding 3 percent annual pay increases over three years and job security clauses in their new enterprise agreement. The airline is opposed to any clause that restricts it from outsourcing work and claims that the wage increase, along with new classification increments and travel, could cost an additional 28.6 percent over three years. Negotiations continued during the week.

Two other unions representing pilots and ground staff are also pursuing job security clauses, although the Australian and International Pilots Association has not yet applied for a ballot for protected industrial action. Enterprise bargaining negotiations with the Transport Workers Union are due to commence in June.

## **Victorian paint workers still on strike**

Over 120 employees from the Melbourne plant of Australia's largest paint manufacturer, PPG Industries, have been on strike and picketing the factory since March 28, after rejecting the company's proposal for a two-tiered wage system. Although PPG has hired 100 contractors to replace its striking employees, business commentators predict that if the dispute is prolonged, supplies of paint and coatings to Ford, Holden and Toyota will be affected.

According to the United Voice union, new recruits would be paid 43 percent below the current rate. Although PPG reported a 129 percent rise in profits to \$769 million last year, management claims its current pay rate is higher than its competitors and unsustainable. United Voice and PPG are holding ongoing talks.

A striker, Erny Barron, who has worked at the site for 15 years, told the media, "It's a definite threat to our future and it's very heartbreaking at the moment because we had a good rapport with the managers, good mateship and that's now gone," he said.

## **Australian government research scientists protest**

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) scientists held two-hour protest meetings in Australia's six state capital cities and the federal capital Canberra on Wednesday. The protests were part of a national campaign by the CSIRO Staff Association for an improved work agreement. The dispute has been ongoing for the past seven months. Workers' demands include an annual pay rise, redundancy payouts and calls for improved staff consultation.

CSIRO management is holding out for a 3 percent per annum increase over three to four years, which the Staff Association claims does not cover rising living costs. The association wants a 4.6 percent pay rise.

## **Western Australian aged-care workers locked out**

Five aged-care workers at the Carinya of Bicton nursing home in Perth's southern suburbs have been locked out for two weeks and had their pay stopped after walking off the job for four hours last week to demand an improved work agreement. The United Voice members took the legally protected industrial action to attend a Community Cabinet meeting in Perth to protest to the Prime Minister Julia Gillard about low pay in the aged-care sector.

Negotiations on a new enterprise deal have dragged on for over nine months. The workers want a \$1 an hour pay rise and annual leave to achieve parity with other aged-care sector employees. Management has only offered 26 cents per hour increase. The Carinya workers have not had a pay rise for two years.

The lockout is the second at the nursing home this year. Up to 50 workers were locked out in January after they held a four-hour stoppage over the issue. A Fair Work Australia (FWA) tribunal ruled that the January lockout was illegal.

## **Canberra bus maintenance workers extend work bans**

Bus maintenance workers at government-owned ACTION Buses in Canberra are stepping up work bans this weekend. As well as refusing overtime and higher duties, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members will be banning the refueling of buses and maintenance work this Saturday as part of their 15-month dispute for an improved work agreement.

An AMWU official said the Saturday work bans were ongoing. ACTION has responded by replacing its Saturday schedule with a Sunday timetable and claims that 13,000 passengers will be affected this weekend.

## **New Zealand teachers union pushes through sell-out deal**

On Monday, the Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) announced it had convinced its members to accept a ministry of education pay deal that will leave teachers worse off. The settlement, which fails to keep up with inflation, grants trained teachers an average pay increase of just 1.6 percent per annum over the next two years, together with a one-off payment of \$300 (\$US240). Untrained teachers will receive \$800, but no pay increase. The Reserve Bank of New Zealand predicts that inflation will peak at over 5 percent this year.

PPTA president, Robin Duff, claimed that, "The settlement has been challenging in an earthquake-stricken economy, but we've achieved significant gains for our members."

In March, the union ordered teachers to lift all work bans and sent clear signals that it intended to use the recent earthquakes that hit Christchurch to push through a sell-out deal. 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."

Last year, PPTA members held a series of strikes, including nation-wide walkouts, to demand a 4 percent pay rise. The ministry's offer at that time was 2.75 percent over two years, plus an \$800 one-off payment.

## **New Zealand financial sector workers strike**

In a dispute over a wage increase, employees at 17 branches of the Public Service Investment Society (PSIS), New Zealand's largest credit union, walked off the job for two hours on Wednesday forcing the branches to close.

Finance and Information Workers Union members have twice voted down the PSIS's "Option A" and "Option B" offers, which include improved relief staffing arrangements but only provides for a 2.5 percent increase for 12 months (Option A), or a 4 percent increase over 18 months (Option B). Workers want a wage rise that compensates for increased living costs.

## **Papuan mine workers protest**

Hundreds of workers at an Indonesian copper and gold mine in Papua, run by Freeport-McMoran Copper & Gold Inc, protested on April 8 to demand improved protection. The protest was sparked after the killing of two colleagues while on their way to work. According to police, their vehicle was shot at, causing it to burst into flames, trapping the two workers. Two other workers were wounded in a similar shooting incident the previous day.

The Freeport mine has been a frequent source of friction in Papua because of its environmental impact, the low share of revenue going to local Papuans, and the legality of payments by the mine operator to Indonesian security forces who are used to quell any unrest from workers and local inhabitants.



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