

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

23 April 2011

China: Shanghai truckers strike

Hundreds of truck drivers in the Waigaoqiao zone, one of Shanghai's busiest ports, struck on April 20 to protest rising fuel prices and low wages. In 2008, there were similar strikes over fuel prices as taxi drivers took to the streets across China. The April 20 protests come a week after residents gathered in the Sonjiang district in Shanghai to demonstrate against urban management officials who were said to have beaten a pedestrian in a traffic dispute.

The Chinese Communist Party, which has boosted spending in police and internal security, is acutely conscious that these social and industrial issues will coalesce, leading to ever bigger demonstrations that could be both harder to contain and control.

India: Telugu film industry workers extend strike

Striking workers from the Telugu film industry, including technicians, lighting, production and women's-production workers, rejected the Andhra Pradesh Film Chamber of Commerce pay rise offer of 32 percent and decided to remain on strike to demand a better offer. Strikers from 17 other disciplines returned to work after their representatives took up the chamber's offer.

Over 14,000 members of the Andhra Pradesh Film Industry Employees Federation struck on April 8, halting production on 18 big-budget films to demand higher wages. This was the second time this year Telugu film workers had struck over salaries. According to the federation, most workers, including junior artists, are paid between 350 and 365 rupees (\$US8.30) for a 12-hour day.

According to the workers who are remaining on strike, they are required to be on the set for at least 16 hours, but are paid for only 12 hours. If they accepted the chamber's offer their pay would increase from 300 to just 460 rupees.

They are demanding at least 600 rupees per day to compensate for the extra hours worked.

Unemployed linemen in Punjab begin hunger strike

This week, members of the Unemployed Linesman Union (ULU)—workers who have completed the apprenticeship course offered by the Punjab State Power Corporation (PSPCL)—stepped up their long running campaign to take up vacant positions in the state-owned company. At least 20 imprisoned ULU members, out of 100 who are serving prison sentences for involvement in a demonstration on April 14 in Talwandi Sabo, have begun a hunger strike and more members are expected to join them. On March 4 police baton charged over 100 unemployed linemen who had been protesting in front of the mini-secretariat in Muktsar for over a month on the issue.

According to a union spokesman the government had issued orders on October 27 last year to PSPCL to immediately recruit 5,000 linemen on a contract basis on a salary of 10,000 rupees per month (\$US222). The positions remain vacant. The unemployed linemen and their families plan to continue protesting in Badal village.

Gujarat sanitation workers strike

On Sunday, hundreds of sanitation workers of the Bhavnagar Municipal Corporation (BMC) in Gujarat walked off the job for 24 hours and rallied at the Atabhai Circle, Bhavnagar to demand an end to the contract system. Over 500 were detained by police as the strikers waited for the arrival of the state chief minister to put forward their charter of demands. The protesters in black saris and belts distributed pamphlets to the people.

The general secretary of the Akhil Bharariya Valmiki Mahasabha said other demands included a wage increase and compensation for the families of workers who had died on duty.

Gujarat university teachers implement work bans

Temporary teachers at the Maharaja Sayajirao University (MSU) of Baroda in Vadodara, Gujarat have decided not to undertake any assessment work of examinations until MSU authorities resolve their long-pending demands. They have been wearing black ribbons during examination duty, and on Monday the All Temporary Teachers union will submit a memorandum to the MSU vice-chancellor and officiating registrar.

Demands include, among others, that all temporary teachers who have worked for over three years be made permanent and are paid the Sixth Pay Commission pay scale on par with permanent teachers. According to the union most teaching work at the university is done by temporary teachers and many have worked for over 20 years.

Jaipur rural health workers end hunger strike

On April 15, ten contractual workers of the Jaipur National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) ended their four-day hunger strike after the state government agreed to consider the demand of the state's 10,000 NRHM contract workers for regularisation. The Rajasthan NRHM contract workers' union wants a written assurance from the state government that contractual workers would be regularised by 2012 when the NRHM is due to end.

A union official claimed that while the Congress Party was contesting the election, it had promised to regularise contract workers under NRHM, but despite its two years of rule, these promises have not been met.

Karnataka village council workers demonstrate

On April 19, civil employees of gram panchayats (villages or small towns) held demonstrations in Hubli-Dharwad and Shimoga to demand improved wages and entitlements.

Demonstrators in Hubli-Dharwad, including porters and drivers of mini-goods vehicles, demanded revision of wages and a proper pension, housing and insurance scheme, as well as regular supply of food grains and establishment of a labour welfare fund. Contract and daily wage workers in Shimoga demanded a dearness allowance adjusted to the Consumer Price Index.

Karnataka Gram Panchayat Workers' Association, which is affiliated with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, organised the protest.

Canberra bus maintenance workers maintain bans

Bus maintenance workers at government-owned ACTION Buses in Canberra have rejected the government's latest pay offer and are maintaining an overtime ban begun on April 9. According to the government, the bans will impact on the maintenance and refuelling of buses, severely reducing the number of services available during the Easter holiday long weekend.

The Australian Capital Territory government has been negotiating with the Transport Workers Union (TWU) (covering drivers) and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) (covering mechanics) on an enterprise bargaining agreement for almost 18 months. The government is offering a 2.5 per cent pay rise and a \$650 sign-on bonus, but wants to introduce a 24-hour roster for drivers with no loading. The government has rejected the TWU's demand for an overall 15 per cent roster loading.

AMWU members want changes to their work roster which ACTION management opposes. Under the changes, the maintenance workshop would close after midday on Fridays and workers would be called in on Sunday to do urgent maintenance work.

The unions have rejected the government's demand that the dispute be put to Fair Work Australia for arbitration.



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