

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

15 September 2012

Bangladeshi non-governmental teachers strike

About 500,000 teachers and employees of 28,000 non-government schools, colleges and madrassahs across the country began a six-day strike on September 9 over a charter of 17 demands. These include speedy implementation of the National Education Policy 2010, increased house rent, medical and festival allowances, annual increment as per teachers and employees of government educational institutions, and the retirement age fixed at 65.

The Bangladesh Teachers-Employees Oikya Parishad told media that if their demands were not met at a meeting with the education minister on September 23 teachers would rally in Dhaka on September 30 and announce a fresh program of protests.

Bangladeshi university teachers and students end action

The five-month campaign of strikes and protests by teachers and students at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) to demand the sacking of the Vice Chancellor (VC) and pro-VC will end on September 15. The government has agreed to remove the VC and pro-VC and withdraw cases filed against teachers and students.

Teachers had made 16 allegations of corruption and irregularities against the chancellors. The Buet Teachers' Association wants reestablishment of previous arrangements where administrative positions are filled by teachers and based on merit and seniority.

Pakistan: Lahore doctors ordered not to strike

For the third time in as many months, young doctors at Lahore's public hospitals were ordered by the Lahore High Court to call off strike action planned for September 14 and 17 in a long-running dispute over wages and benefits. Young Doctors' Association (YDA) members were forced by the high court to end a three-week strike on July 9 after the government failed to end the industrial action by mobilising Pakistan Army doctors as scabs and arresting 60 doctors on trumped up criminal charges.

Under the current service structure, young resident doctors who do not share a private practice receive low wages and lower service-related benefits. According to the YDA, a commencing young doctor's salary is only 24,000 rupees (\$US253) per month.

The high court has called for submissions from the government to answer YDA claims that it has failed to honour previous promises that would have resolved the dispute.

India: Tamil Nadu carpet weavers win pay rise

Around 18,000 carpet weavers in Tamil Nadu's Bhavani region ended their seven-day strike on September 7, after master weavers agreed to increase wages from July 15. The Bhavani Region Handloom Carpet and Bed Spread Weavers and Dyeing Workers Union had demanded that the master weavers implement a new wage agreement approved by the Department of Handlooms and Textiles. Weavers also wanted a wage rise for winders, from 78.45 rupees (\$US1.41) to 90 rupees.

Protesting Tami Nadu noon-meal workers arrested

As part of five days of protests across the state, 500 noon-meal workers were arrested when they tried to picket the Collector building in Madurai on September 10. Among those arrested were 400 women. Their main demands included regularisation of noon-meal workers, a fixed pay structure and entitlements on par with other government employees. The protests were organised by the Tamil Nadu Noon Meal Workers' Sangam.

Orissa alumina refinery workers protest

Fearing the loss of thousands of jobs, workers of the privately owned Vedanta Alumina refinery, along with workers from associated industries, protested at the Kalahandi Collector office on September 11 to demand immediate provision of bauxite to run for the plant. Vedanta Aluminium Limited (VAL) had informed the Odisha government that it planned to shut down the plant from December 5 due to a scarcity of bauxite that it claimed prevented the refinery running at full capacity.

Chinese teachers protest for pay

Thousands of teachers protested in eastern China's Shandong province on September 10 in a long running dispute over dues and recognition for their services. The estimated 4,000 community teachers gathered on Teachers' Day, a national holiday, outside the provincial government but were prevented by dozens of armed police from entering the building to deliver a petition. Many other community teachers who planned to join the protest were stopped along the way by police.

According to protesters, senior teachers have been campaigning for

years for salaries and compensation due to them for relief duties they performed while serving in rural areas decades ago. The protest ended after authorities met with teachers' representatives and said they would issue a document to "address the problem."

Burmese garment workers walk out

On September 7, 1,000 garment workers left the job and marched for several hours from their factory to the labour office in the Mayangone township on the outskirts of Yangon (former capital of Burma known as Rangoon) to demand increased pay. "I'm here to ask for a salary increase," said a female worker who said she only received \$US90 a month including overtime.

Strikers told media they were tricked into not striking earlier in the year when nearby factory workers walked out to demand salary increases. "When other factories faced protests, our employers persuaded us not to demonstrate and promised they would take care of us. But they just gave us a bottle of cooking oil. Nothing else," one worker said.

New legislation allows workers to form unions and to strike when employers have been given advance notice but many workers have little understanding of the new rules.

Unpaid Cambodian garment workers strike

About 500 employees at the Sein-Atree garment factory in the Samrong Torn district, north of Cambodia, marched to the provincial labour department on September 13 over an unresolved dispute over unpaid wages. They walked off the job for two days, claiming to have only received half of their August pay.

In addition, workers have demanded revisions to the factory's policies, such as not forcing employees to work overtime, promptly paying dismissed workers, paying workers on maternity leave 50 percent of their salary in advance and not firing employees without just cause. "The workers will be fired if they go to the toilet more than two times a day and talk on the phone," said a Free Trade Union official.

A Sein-Atree manager told workers that the factory was short of money and wages would not be paid until new contracts are signed on September 20.

Cambodian garment workers partially compensated for strike

Over 2,500 workers at the Ocean garment factory in Phnom Penh, which manufactures for retail giant Gap, are to be compensated for a 16-day strike in August over sexual harassment by a factory manager, and the sacking of union representatives. Strikers returned to work on August 31, after the Court of First Instance issued an injunction to allow the five union representatives back to work. Sexual harassment claims against the accused manager were filed with police and the Phnom Penh Municipal Court and are still pending.

Following negotiations on September 8, the Collective Union of Movement of Workers announced that Ocean management would pay striking workers half their daily wage and allowance for pay lost during the strike to a total of \$US20 each.

Queensland Catholic school teachers continue strike action

Teachers at the Ignatius Park College in Townsville, on Queensland's mid-north coast, walked out for 30 minutes on September 11 in a pay dispute. The action followed a strike by 6,500 colleagues at Catholic schools across the state last week to protest over low pay and increased workloads in a new agreement. Teachers propose to continue with 30-minute rolling stoppages and to stop attending staff meetings and co-curricular activities.

Members of the Independent Education Union of Australia (IEUA) have rejected 2.7 percent annual pay increases over three years from the Queensland Catholic Education Commission because it does not keep pace with the increased cost of living. The IEUA has opposed attempts to impose compulsory medical checks on teachers and wants increased release time for preparation and to deal with student issues.

Western Australian court security guards strike

Around 100 security guards, employed by G4S at the district and central law courts in the state's capital Perth, walked off the job for 24 hours on September 10 in a pay dispute. Several court proceedings were cancelled for the day.

Members of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) rejected G4S's latest pay offer of annual increases between 4 and 5 percent, claiming that trade-offs such as cuts to service pay could reduce wages by \$100 per week for some employees. Workers' concerns include G4S insisting on a four-year agreement and a reduction in minimum weekly hours from 30 to 25. The employer has also refused to guarantee back pay to July 1 once an enterprise agreement is signed.

Perth public hospital nurses protest

Around 300 nurses and health workers from public hospitals in Perth rallied outside parliament house on September 11 to oppose the state Liberal government's plan to increase parking fees for staff and the public at several hospitals throughout the metropolitan area.

An Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) official said staff could be paying up to \$7.50 per day to park at their workplace. The proposed increase represents up to a \$6 per day rise at most hospitals since 2009 when parking fees were \$1.50. Most of the hospital car parks are operated by private contractors.

The ANF has not opposed parking fees or called for decisive industrial action to have them removed. Instead, the ANF has given an assurance to the health minister that there will be no disruptions over the issue. At Tuesday's rally it restricted the nurses to demands for "affordable parking."

Victorian firefighters protest

Over 1,000 firefighters rallied outside state parliament in Melbourne on September 13, to protest state government cuts to firefighting budgets. The United Firefighters Union (UFU) said the cuts, totalling \$66 million, are already having an impact on frontline firefighting. A union official said the cuts had prevented the agencies recruiting new staff and training firefighters and put a freeze on pay for support staff. Expenditure on firefighting equipment has also been affected.

Victorian casino maintenance workers strike

Around 100 maintenance staff at the Crown casino in Melbourne have threatened to walk off the job on September 15 after three months of negotiations for a new work agreement stalled. Fair Work Australia has approved applications from the Electrical Trades Union and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union for industrial action that could include 24-hour stoppages and work bans.

Workers taking action include carpenters, electricians, plumbers, upholsterers and other maintenance employees. A spokesman for the unions said only safety maintenance work would be performed.

Victorian municipal council workers vote for strike

Australian Services Union members employed by the Greater Dandenong Council, in the south-eastern suburb of Melbourne, have voted to impose work bans across the council after six months of negotiations for a new enterprise agreement stalled. Workers oppose the council's pay offer of annual 1.2 percent increases, which compared to 3 percent cost of living increases, constitute a pay cut.

Industrial action will include bans on administration and emptying public area bins and no maintenance of parks and ovals. Stop-work action has been called for September 20 along with a rally outside the council's Springvale Office.

Solomon Islands luxury hotel workers issue strike notice

The Solomon Islands National Union of Workers (SINUW), representing 150 employees at one of Solomon Islands' premier hotels, Heritage Park Hotel, has issued a 28-day strike notice that will lapse on October 1.

Workers walked off the job and held a 24-hour sit-in protest on August 10 in a long-running dispute over pay and conditions. They agreed to return to work the following day after management agreed to deal with their log of claims and respond by August 31. This has not occurred.

SINUW has lodged a notice of dispute with the Trade Disputes Panel and sought a hearing in the High Court over the workers' grievances.



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