Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

16 March 2013

India: Maharashtra university teachers' boycott into second month

On March 8, 5,000 teachers from universities across India's western state of Maharashtra gathered at the Azad Maidan sports ground in Mumbai to participate in a "jail bharo andolan" or "fill the jails" protest. The event was organised by the Federation of University and College Teachers Organisations to demand implementation of the sixth pay commission arrears and the filling of vacant positions with qualified contract teachers.

More than 45,000 teachers from eight universities are maintaining a boycott on exam preparations that they began on February 4. Government officials said they had initiated the process of invoking the Essential Services Maintenance Act, which would make the industrial action illegal and impose heavy fines on teachers if they fail to lift the boycott.

Last year, teachers at two colleges ended strike action after university authorities agreed to pay the sixth pay commission arrears. However, the payments were never extended to the other state universities and colleges.

Bosch workers in Bangalore end strike

Over 2,500 employees at Bosch's Adugodi auto parts manufacturing plant in Bangalore called off a three-day strike on March 11. The sudden walkout on March 7 was triggered when Bosch management suspended a fellow worker. In a long-running pay dispute, members of the MICO Employees Association (MEA) had been on "go-slow" industrial action for several months, which the company claimed had reduced production by 40 percent.

To end the strike, the company only agreed to reinstate the suspended worker and "revise the incentive payment factor progressively." In a step that signals a union sellout, Bosch also agreed to include the MEA general secretary in all future discussions.

Kerala fuel tanker drivers strike

Over 1,200 fuel tanker workers in India's south western coastal state of Kerala struck for 48 hours on March 10 to demand better amenities at the Indian Oil Corporation's oil terminal at Irumpanam. In addition, the Kerala State Tanker Lorry Workers Union has called for monthly allowances to be increased to 6,000 rupees ($US110) and 3,000 rupees, for drivers and cleaners respectively. Lorry owners did not respond to their demands.

Rajasthan hospital workers strike

Contractual employees, including cleaners, trolley pullers, computer operators and lab technicians, at the Sawai Man Singh (SMS) hospital, the major hospital of Jaipur, the capital of India's north western state of Rajasthan, have been on strike since March 5 in a dispute over a wage increase. In an attempt to starve the strikers back to work, the government has deployed civil defence personnel to do their work. Strikers said they would not return to work until they were given a wage increase.

Karnataka hospital workers walk out

Over 300 employees at the R.L. Jalappa Hospital in Kolar, Karnataka walked off the job and protested outside the hospital on March 8 to demand improved wages and facilities. Workers complained that after ten years' service

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they were still paid as little as 6,000 rupees ($US110) a month. Management convinced strikers to return to work after giving a written assurance that their demands would be met within a fortnight.

Cambodian factory workers fight for pay rise

More than a thousand garment workers walked off the job and protested outside their Cambodian factories on March 12 to demand a minimum wage increase and better working conditions. At the SixPlus factory, an Adidas supplier in Kandal province, 600 workers demanded a monthly minimum wage increase from $US61 to $120 and day-off benefits, among other demands. Management had offered just $71 a month and rejected all other demands.

Meanwhile, at the E Cheng Cambodia Cooperation factory in Takeo province over 1,000 employees walked out to demand a minimum wage increase to $80 a month, and other benefits.

Thai factory workers protest

Hundreds of employees from the factories of large foreign companies in Thailand rallied in Bangkok on March 13 and demonstrated outside the embassies of the US, Australia and the Netherlands to protest against unfair employment practices and unjustified layoffs. A spokesman for the workers said companies had changed employment conditions and laid off workers following a government directive to lift the minimum daily wage by 30 percent to 300 baht ($US10) from January.

The spokesman claimed that Dutch electronics producer NXP had reduced the number of working days from six to four a week, and required workers to work four extra hours a day. Though the workers are paid for their overtime work, they are earning less than before. Other companies like GE Motors have delayed paying the increase for two years, while others have flatly refused to lift wages.

Thai rural doctors protest

About 100 rural doctors, members of the Rural Doctors Society, gathered at the Public Health Ministry office in Nonthaburi province on March 13 to protest against a new policy to pay a hardship allowance based on performance. Under proposed changes to the 30-baht (B30) health care scheme, which covers over 48 million people, the hardship allowance—based on the isolation level of the areas in which the doctors were working and their length of experience at rural community hospitals—will be eliminated, or reduced.

More than 44,000 physicians work in Thailand. About 3,000 work in rural areas, and 500 of them have more than 10 years of experience. The government proposes to cut the monthly allowance by 50 percent. For some doctors it will mean a cut of 30,000 baht ($US1,000) in their monthly salaries.

Tasmanian bus drivers resume industrial action

Around 300 bus drivers at the Tasmanian state government-owned Metro bus company in Hobart, Burnie and Launceston will begin a series of stopwork meetings from March 15 after negotiations between the company and the Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) reached a deadlock. The RTBU wants annual 3 percent pay increases over three years but Metro has offered 2.1 percent—just 30 cents a week better than its original offer.

Under Metro's latest offer, drivers would earn between $715 a week in their first year and $865 in their fourth year. This is well below Tasmania’s average weekly ordinary time earnings for 2012, which was $1,223. The RTBU has indicated that it is willing to accept productivity trade-offs to reach agreement.

The latest action follows a series of limited stoppages since late February, which have not put any significant pressure on the state Labor government to meet the drivers’ demands.

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