

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

20 July 2013

India: Tamil Nadu handloom workers protest wage cuts

Handloom weavers demonstrated in Kangayam, Tamil Nadu on July 17 against the recent reduction in the job work charges and delays in the disbursal of bank loans under a government scheme to upgrade the weavers' looms.

Weavers complained that since import duties on raw materials increased by up to 15 percent that entrepreneurs, who supply them with raw materials, had slashed the amount they paid weavers for their products.

Landless farm workers block roads in Tamil Nadu

On July 16, over 900 farm labourers, including 670 women, organised by the Tamil Nadu Agriculture Workers Union temporarily blocked roads in four villages in Tuticorin district with several demands. This included establishment of a regulated pension scheme with the right to receive 3,000-rupee at age 55, drought relief assistance of 10,000 rupees for farm labourer's families, and land for housing.

Karnataka contract hostel workers demonstrate

Hundreds of Karnataka State Composite Hostel Workers Union members protested outside the Raichur zilla panchayat (village government) office on July 16 to demand permanency and payment of outstanding dues. Protesters, including cooks, watchmen, assistants and

helpers, complained that they had not been paid a government-approved wage rise due to take effect in April last year.

Delhi University non-permanent teachers protest

Delhi University Teacher's Association (DUTA) representatives protested outside the vice chancellor's office on July 17 to demand permanent jobs for 4,000 ad-hoc faculty members.

According to DUTA, at least 50 percent of the teaching staff in the university is employed on a temporary basis and not entitled to medical, study or maternity leave. The protest was organised after the vice chancellor failed to meet a commitment to begin making permanent positions available to ad-hoc teachers this year.

Karnataka communications workers demonstrate

Karnataka State BSNL Causal/Contract Employees' Union members protested outside the Raichur head office of India's communications giant BSNL to demand dues and a provident fund. Police were mobilised to prevent workers entering the office.

A union official alleged that the contractors had not deposited the provident fund into the personal accounts of the contract workers since 2001 and that many had not been paid for three months. Workers complained that they had been forced to work 12-hour days without overtime payments.

The demonstration was sparked after three contract employers fled the state without paying dues. The contract

workers union told media that BSNL is the principle employer and legally obliged to ensure workers wages and entitlements are paid. The protest ended after a BSNL official met with union officials and gave a verbal commitment to resolve the issue.

Perth airport security screeners still locked out

The Fair Work Commission ruled this week that the lockout and withholding of pay of 14 security screening workers by their employer MSS Security at Perth domestic airport in Western Australia was “lawful”. MSS began locking out workers on May 28 after 80 United Voice (UV) union members began a series of 24-hour and 48-hour stoppages, and rolling work bans.

UV members were demanding a 20 percent pay rise over three years to bring them in line with their eastern states colleagues. After four weeks of industrial action, however, UV reduced the pay demand to 12 percent over three years. The UV has now limited industrial action to various ineffective work bans on checking bags, aerosols and lap top computers. MSS has maintained its original offer of 3.2 percent annual pay increases over four years.

New South Wales public hospital nurses and midwives vote to strike

The NSW Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA), in an ongoing dispute with the state Liberal government over public hospital nurse-to-patient ratios, has called for state-wide stop work meetings of its 30,000 members for July 24. The meetings will be held in Sydney and 17 regional centres.

The call for strike action follows a series of lunchtime protests in May to demand guaranteed minimum nursing hours in general wards, on par with the larger hospitals in Sydney. This equates to a minimum of six hours per patient per day or one nurse for every four patients. The current state award expired on June 30.

Other demands include minimum nursing and midwifery levels to hospital emergency departments and high dependency units and that midwives have a maximum of four hours per shift contact time with

patients, leaving four hours to attend to associated duties.

The NSWNMA has restricted its pay demand to 2.5 percent annual increases in exchange for guaranteed staff-to-patient ratios. The state government is seeking to discount the wage claim by absorbing into it the scheduled 0.25 percent rise in compulsory employer superannuation from July 1.

Solomon Islands teachers strike again

On July 16, the Solomon Islands National Teachers Association, representing 8,000 public school teachers, called a national stoppage over the government’s failure to honour its pay agreement. The action followed a four-week strike in March/April over the issue, which like the strike in February, followed repeated broken promises to implement a new salary structure, which the government agreed to in February 2012 after three years of negotiations.

While the government claims it had always accepted the teachers’ wage and allowance demands, it has never budgeted for the \$34 million required for the increase and to date has only paid the rise to about 2,000 teachers. SINTA ended the previous strike after the government said it would pay all teachers the new salary scale by the end of June.

The government has now promised to meet the teachers’ demand by July 25 but threatened to deregister the union if the strike is not ended. Teachers said they would stay out until all teachers receive the increase.



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