

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

28 September 2013

## India: Andhra Pradesh revenue assistants protest

On September 23, Village Revenue Assistants (VRA) Association members demonstrated in Nalgonda district to demand that wages be lifted from 3,500 rupees (\$US70) to 7,500 rupees per month. They want a pay rise in line with Sixth Pay Commission recommendations and maternity leave for female employees. Their action followed a state-wide protest by 50,000 VRA members on July 17 over the same demands.

## Pakistan: Peshawar doctors strike

Doctors at government hospitals in Peshawar walked out for two days on September 17, forcing the closure of outpatient departments of three major hospitals. Their demands included re-positioning doctors according to the public service structure, increases in salaries and allowances, and employment regularisation of contract doctors.

The Provincial Doctors Association (PDA) ended the strike after the government said it agreed with the union's demands and would establish a committee to investigate service-structure issues. The PDA has not established an implementation deadline but warned that there would be more strikes if the government failed to honour its promises.

## Cambodia: SL garment workers locked out

Around 2,500 employees or almost half the workforce at two SL Garment Processing plants in Phnom Penh have been locked out since September 20 after protesting inside the factories. The occupations began after management failed to honour a commitment to reinstate 700 employees sacked for leading an 18-day strike last month. Workers also learnt that they were to receive only half of their September salary due to the strike.

At least 100 military police have been deployed around the factories' perimeter, in addition to dozens of security guards stationed inside. Employees who were allowed inside the plants have refused to work while the lockout is in force. SL Garment Processing is one of Asia's largest garment manufacturers.

The garment workers first struck on August 12 over eight claims, including an increase in the minimum wage to \$US150 per month, a return to an eight-hour daily schedule, a \$3 meal allowance and removal of military police from inside the company's factories. The industrial action ended on August 30, after municipal authorities ordered that military police be removed from the plants, but workers walked out a few days later after management sacked 700 workers.

## Indonesia: Contract electricity workers threaten action

Outsourced employees at electricity distribution company PT PLN have threatened to cut power to Indonesia's capital Jakarta if their demand for permanent employment is not resolved by the end of October. A spokesman for the Joint Movement of State-Owned Enterprises' Outsourced Workers complained

that outsourced contract employees do not receive any entitlements.

There are over 14 million outsourced workers in Indonesia. Employers use outsourcing to by-pass the country's limited labour regulations and deny wage rises and benefits. Although they work alongside regular employees, outsourced workers often lack access to health care, holiday pay and pension funds.

In an attempt to end mass protests in October 2012, the government announced plans to limit the use of outsourced labour. While outsourcing was restricted in some businesses it was permitted in the cleaning, security, transportation, catering, oil, gas and mining industries. The government, however, postponed this limited decree after the Indonesian Employers Association declared that its members would temporarily close their factories or relocate overseas.

### **Victorian university staff strike**

Members of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) at the University of Melbourne walked off the job for 24 hours on September 25 and established pickets at the university's entrances in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Despite 30 rounds of negotiations, a stalemate remains on a wage rise, job security and staff workloads.

NTEU members have rejected an 11.7 percent wage increase over four years because it is below inflation and represents a wage cut. The university wants to cut redundancy payments to non-academic staff and has refused to cap academic workloads or reduce casualisation. It also wants to introduce fixed-term contracts.

### **New South Wales municipal workers protest**

On September 20, 700 employees of the Newcastle City Council, 70km north of Sydney, stopped work and rallied in the city centre to protest planned budget cuts. Unite Services Union members fear that the council is

planning to contract out swim lifeguards and other services. It is the second time council workers have demonstrated over the issue. Workers voted to impose overtime bans if the council fails to provide job security guarantees by the end of the month.

### **New Zealand public hospital workers remain suspended**

Eleven IT workers at the Grey Base Hospital in Greymouth, on New Zealand's South Island, were suspended without pay and banned from the premises on September 16, after imposing work bans in a wages dispute with the District Health Board (DHB). They attempted to return to work on September 23 but were told their suspensions had been extended.

The Association of Professionals and Executive Employees members had taken action after rejecting the DHB's offer of a 1.5 percent pay rise. Union members have said that they are earning 23 percent less than average market rates for the South Island.

The work bans include not using email or electronic communications and a ban on re-call duty outside of their normal hours. While DHB management told the media last week that it would continue negotiations it now is refusing to enter talks with the union.



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