Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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India: Jharkhand coal miners down tools after death

Workers at Central Coalfields Limited's open cast mine in Rajrappa, in India's eastern state of Jharkhand, walked off the job for several hours on October 6 to protest the death of a night shift miner. According to workers, Upendra Mahto was run over by a dumper in an accident caused by the company's violation of safety rules. The miners told the media that they had previously made many appeals to management to upgrade safety at the open cut pit.

Chennai airport workers protest privatisation

Following several days of lunchtime protests, 500 Airport Authorities of India (AAI) workers at Chennai airport, Tamil Nadu demonstrated at various locations around the airport on October 7, as seven companies inspected facilities prior to bidding on the purchase of the facility.

AAI Employees' Union members waved black flags and restricted the movement of the potential buyers at the airport. Airport employees are concerned that their jobs and working conditions could be eliminated when the facility is privatised.

The Indian government announced earlier this year that it intends to sell 15 major revenue-earning airports around the country after spending over 37,000 million rupees ($US750 million) to modernise them. The government has invited global bids for the Kolkata, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Lucknow and Guwahati airports.

Bangladesh: More violent attacks on garment workers

On October 7, police used teargas and batons to attack striking Ehsan Moonlight Sweater Factory workers in Gazipur on the outskirts of Dhaka. The violent assault came on the second day of strike action by the garment workers who are demanding better wages and conditions.

The workers have called for the arrest of the production manager, alleging that he viciously assaulted several strikers the previous day. The garment workers are demanding an increase in the attendance allowance and an extension of leave, from 7 to 10 days. Authorities closed the factory fearing the protest would escalate.

Pakistani teachers in Punjab protest

Over 80 Government Municipal Model School teachers protested in Gujrat city, Punjab province on October 2 to demand a wage rise and regularisation of service. Protesters said they had been working for the Education Department for 18 years, many receiving a meagre salary of 3,000 rupees ($US33) a month. The official minimum wage in Punjab is 10,000 rupees.

Pakistani municipal workers in Karak threaten strike

Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) workers in Karak, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, have threatened to strike at the end of the month if their dues are not paid. According to the TMA Employees Union, municipal employees received only half their salaries last

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month and if the provincial administration failed to make a special grant to the city there would not be enough funds for October salaries. Strike action would impact on water, sanitary and other vital services.

The withholding of workers' salaries is common by Pakistan public sector employers, including municipal councils, which are among the most affected by budget cuts now being implemented throughout the country.

In June, the newly elected Nawaz Sharif government sought an emergency loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to avert a foreign reserves crisis. While the IMF agreed to consider a bailout package, it demanded that Pakistan further slash expenditure, increase taxes, and reform economic policy.

Sri Lankan health workers protest

Several dozen health workers protested outside the Colombo National Hospital on October 7 for a wage rise due in 2006. An All Ceylon Health Services Union official told the media that the non-payment of dues impacted on health workers across Sri Lanka and that protests would be held, in turn, at all government hospitals and be followed by strike action.

RMIT University staff in Melbourne cancel classes

On October 10, academic and professional staff at RMIT University in Melbourne cancelled classes and closed services in a 24-hour strike over an enterprise bargaining agreement. Picket lines were established at several points around the campus.

After 14 months of negotiations, National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members rejected an offer of annual 3 percent pay increases that included an increased workload. Union members say the rise is barely above increases in the cost of living and is effectively a pay cut.

The NTEU wants management to set an upper limit on teaching and teaching related duties, improvements to student staff ratios, better class preparation time allowances and improved job security for casual teachers, who collectively provide more than 50 percent of undergraduate teaching at RMIT.

Tasmanian nurses reject union deal

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation members in Tasmania have rejected a proposed new enterprise agreement negotiated between their union and the Labor-Greens state government. Around 190 nurses in Hobart and Launceston this week unanimously voted down the agreement, citing an unacceptable reduction in their working conditions.

After six weeks of negotiations ANMF officials agreed to annual 2 percent wage increases over three years but with reduced entitlements which meant that the health department's annual wage bill would remain unchanged.

While nurses accepted the limited pay rise they rejected the mandatory rostering of annual leave, the removal of 11.5 public holidays per year, and eight-hour shifts reduced to six hours. An ANMF spokesperson told the media that strike action would be called if an improved offer was not made by October 18 but emphasised that union officials would continue negotiations with the health department.

French Polynesian hospital workers strike

Hundreds of employees at Tahiti's Taaone Hospital, French Polynesia's main health facility, began strike action on October 8 and are picketing all vehicle entrances to the hospital. Nearly 400 workers on limited contracts want permanent status. Many of them have been in their respective jobs for years. Under French industrial law limited work contracts are generally not longer than 18 months.

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