

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

25 January 2014

## Asia

### Hong Kong domestic workers protest over abuse

Thousands of people rallied in Hong Kong on January 18 to demand justice for a young Indonesian maid Erwiana Sulistyaningsih, 22, who was reportedly crippled following eight months of physical abuse by her Hong Kong employer. She was admitted to an Indonesian hospital in a critical condition last week after returning home. The protest followed a demonstration three days earlier outside the maid's employment agency followed by a march to the Indonesian consulate.

Hong Kong is home to nearly 300,000 maids, mainly from Indonesia and the Philippines. A Hong Kong couple were jailed in September for attacks on their Indonesian domestic helper, which included burning her with an iron and bike-chain beatings. A Hong Kong human rights group spokesman told media that the organisation receives four to six complaints of physical assaults on maids per month in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's policies on migrant workers often make maids reluctant to report abuse for fear of losing their livelihoods and being deported if they are unable to find a new job within two weeks. Amnesty International in November reported that Indonesian maids were exploited by recruitment and placement agencies that falsely promise high salaries and good working conditions but deny workers their documents and charge excessive fees. Maids in Hong Kong are paid about \$4,000 (\$US515) a month.

### Nepalese doctors on strike

Striking doctors in Nepal are ignoring a Supreme Court return-to-work order in a dispute over the appointment of senior positions in medical institutions. Doctors struck on September 18, affecting several hundred hospitals and clinics. Emergency services are being maintained. Nepal has 400 private and state-run hospitals and thousands of clinics, which serve over 100,000 patients daily.

The Nepal Medical Association (NMA) called the nationwide walkout in support of a well-known orthopaedic surgeon, Govinda K.C., who began a hunger strike ten days earlier at the state-run Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu. An NMA spokesman said doctors fully support Govinda's campaign, which opposes political interference in the appointment of medical college heads and wants greater transparency and autonomy in state-run teaching hospitals.

### Pakistani government school teachers unions call limited protests

Government school teachers in Pakistan's south-eastern Sindh province began "peaceful protests" on January 16 over long-standing demands for time-scale pay, teaching and conveyance allowances and other entitlements.

The Government School Teachers' Association (GSTA)-Sindh has limited teachers' action to sit-ins and one-day "token" hunger strikes and threatened that if members "anywhere tried to boycott classes, the

GSTA would boycott such teachers' units." It has called for teachers to rally outside the Karachi press club on January 27 and then demonstrate at the Sindh Secretariat .

Meanwhile on January 16, Primary Teachers Association members in the Khairpur district held token hunger strikes in several cities to demand reinstatement of sacked colleagues in Tharparkar, regularisation of contractual teachers and other claims.

### **Hyderabad Lady Health Workers strike**

As part of an ongoing national campaign for job security, Lady Health Workers (LHW) Program employees in Hyderabad, Sindh province have been on strike since January 17 to demand regularisation of their services. An All Pakistan Lady Health Workers Association official told the media that Pakistan's Supreme Court ordered the government in February 2012 to regularise LHW jobs. The association also says that workers' salaries had not been paid since September 2013.

There are over 100,000 employed in the LHW program across Pakistan, providing a range of crucial health services, including vaccinations. LHW employees are among the most exploited sections of the Pakistan working class, receiving just 7,000 rupees (\$US77) per month. Many are denied job regularisation despite years of service.

### **India: Haryana state government employees on strike**

Around 200,000 Haryana state government and semi-government employees held a three-day strike on January 20 demanding abolition of the contract system and work outsourcing, regularisation of part-time employees and the cancellation of more than 3,500 private bus operators' permits. Essential services like power and water, hospitals and education have been affected. The majority of government educational

institutions, including colleges and universities have closed. Many power feeders have failed and not been repaired.

The state government has imposed Section 144, banning assemblies of five or more persons and implementing a "no work, no pay" rule against all strikers. A union official of the Haryana Sarv Karamchari Sangh (HSKS) said that at least 200 employees had been arrested for violating Section 144 orders.

The Haryana Roadways Employees Coordination Committee, representing five unions, ordered strikers to end the walkout after 24 hours following a government commitment to regularise 8,500 contract workers at the roadways department. The government, however, has not agreed demands that it cease privatising public transport and cancel private operators' permits.

### **Australia and the Pacific**

#### **Adelaide bus drivers vote to strike**

Bus drivers from public transport providers Transfield and SouthLink in Adelaide, the South Australian capital, have voted to begin industrial action late this month over a new work agreement. Action will start on January 28, when 600 members of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) refuse to collect fares. Up to 15,000 passengers a day will travel free during the protest.

TWU members want a 5 percent pay rise, a review of work rosters to reduce fatigue and for improved driver security. The South Australian Labor government's contract with Transfield and SouthLink only allows for a 2.8 percent wage increase. The government has begun negotiations with the companies and the TWU over the dispute.



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