

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

22 February 2014

Pakistan: Lahore police attack Lady Health Workers

On February 17, police attacked a Lahore protest camp of several hundred Punjab district Lady Health Workers (LHW) employees. The protesting workers are demanding permanent status—as directed by the Supreme Court last year—conveyance allowances, timely payment of salaries and other claims.

There are over 100,000 workers in Pakistan's LHW program, which provides vaccinations and other crucial health services. LHW employees, who are mostly women, have held strikes and protests across the country for the past three months over unpaid salaries and for work regularisation.

LHW employees are among the most exploited sections of the Pakistan working class and receive just 7,000 rupees (\$US77) per month. Many are denied job regularisation despite years of service. There are still 50,000 employees to be regularised in Punjab province alone.

India: Puducherry handloom weavers protest

Weavers from the Ponfab-Pondicherry Co-operative Handloom Export Development Project in Puducherry, on India's east coast, protested in the territory's capital on February 17, to demand the government guarantee thread supplies, regularisation of wages and other work benefits. The rally was organised by the Maoist AICCTU (All India Central Council of Trade Unions).

Ponfab, which supplied a range of woven products to many southeast Asian countries including Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, was severely hit by the global economic slump and the government ending its purchase of the company's products for its free distribution schemes. Since then the Ponfab weavers have been left without work and income and forced to survive by itinerant employment, including house cleaning and construction jobs.

Karnataka child-care workers protest

On February 17, hundreds of Mandya district anganwadi (child-care) workers rallied at the Sri Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar Circle in Bangalore and marched along the Bangalore-Mysore Highway to the deputy commissioner's office to protest against privatisation and other issues. The child-care workers allege that the Congress Party-led Indian government is planning to hand over the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) to private organisations, corporate institutions and self-help groups. The demonstration was organised by the State Anganwadi Workers' Association.

The protesters also want job security, the minimum monthly salary increased to 15,000 rupees (\$US242), a social benefits scheme, basic infrastructure at ICDS centres and the withdrawal of extended working hours. Anganwadi workers rallied in Bangalore in November to demand that their working hours be rolled back to four-and-a-half hours a day.

In 2011, unions representing anganwadi workers convinced them to accept the state government's request that their daily working hours be increased to seven hours, with no increase in salary, on vague promises that their services would eventually be regularised. The promise was never fulfilled.

Andhra Pradesh anganwadi workers protest

Hundreds of anganwadi workers and ayahs (helpers) were detained by police on February 18 after they refused to end a protest outside the Camp Office of the Chief Minister in Hyderabad, the capital of the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.

Anganwadi workers and ayahs want their monthly wage of 4,200 rupees and 2,200 rupees respectively increased to a minimum of 10,000 rupees. The protest was organised by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

Union officials claim that there are over 185,000 anganwadi workers and ayahs in Andhra Pradesh. The central Indian government contributes 3,000 and 700 rupees respectively

towards anganwadi workers and ayahs per month with the balance paid by the state government.

Karnataka municipal contract workers protest

On February 13 contract municipal workers in urban local bodies in the Hassan district, Karnataka, began a campaign of rolling protests. The workers want regularisation of their jobs and monthly wages increased to 10,000 rupees (\$US161) until they are made permanent.

According to the Karnataka State Municipal Workers' Association, most of the Hassan district municipal workers have been employed under the contract system for 10 to 15 years.

Indonesia: Central Sulawesi hospital employees walk out

More than 200 workers from the Central Sulawesi state-owned Undata General Hospital walked off the job for two hours on February 17 to demand payment of outstanding medical service allowances.

Nurses, midwives, laboratory officers, radiologists and pharmacists, representing about 1,300 employees at the hospital, told media that they had not been told why their allowances, which vary between 375,000 rupiah and 500,000 rupiah (\$US43) for diploma certificate and bachelor's degree respectively, have not been paid for the last three months.

A hospital spokesman claimed that the Central Sulawesi government had not released funds for the hospital's budget. According to the media, the hospital has been seriously run down and there had been many complaints from patients. A recent ombudsman report noted that one patient had been left in the hospital's emergency unit for two days without any treatment.

Indonesian paper workers threaten strike action

The Pindo Deli Paper Workers Union (SPKPD), which represents over 13,000 workers at the twin factories of the Indonesian paper mill giant Pindo Deli Karawang Mills Asia Pulp and Paper (APP) in Karawang, West Java, has served notice that workers will begin a month of industrial action on February 27. The dispute is over demands for a wage rise.

APP has deployed soldiers and police in the mills and begun

urging employees not to strike. The industrial action follows strikes and clashes with police over the past two years for salary increases.

Queensland health workers protest

Over 50 people, including doctors, nurses and supporters, demonstrated outside the Hervey Bay Hospital, 300km north of Brisbane, over down-grading of the intensive care unit. Protesters claimed that the changes will deplete the unit of specialist staff, forcing some critically ill patients to be transferred to Brisbane. Demonstrators carried placards with messages such as "Patients before Profits" and "Hands off our public health services."

In 2012 the Liberal National Party state government announced that it would axe 2,754 jobs at Queensland Health, including 1,537 full-time positions at Hospital and Health Services. According to the Queensland Nurses Union, the government has exceeded these numbers, eliminating over 3,500 jobs at Queensland Health by May 2013. The union has refused to mobilise its membership in unified state-wide industrial action to defeat the job cuts.

Western Australian university staff vote for industrial action

National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at the University of Western Australia (UWA) in Perth voted this week to take industrial action for a wage rise. The action includes a ban on overtime and boycotting the Perth Writers Festival. UWA has limited its pay increase offer to 3 percent. The NTEU wants a 4 percent pay rise to compensate for increased workload.

According to the NTEU, student numbers have jumped from 17,000 to 25,000 since 2007 but teaching and research staff cut by 50, to 800, during the same period. The university employs 4,250 full-time equivalent positions. The NTEU has about 650 members, including academic and professional staff.



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