

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

19 April 2014

Asia

India: Toyota lockout continues

Over 4,200 permanent workers at Toyota car assembly plants in Bidadi near Bangalore remain locked out as the union continues to offer concessions to management.

The Toyota Motors Employees Union (TMEU) offered to reduce workers' demands for better wages and conditions during last week's negotiations with Toyota Kirloskar Motor and government representatives if the company ended its four-week lockout and reinstated 30 sacked unionists.

TMEU initially demanded a 4,000-rupee (\$US65) increase per month and other demands, including improved safety, limitations on the use of contract labour, housing facilities, medical benefits and other service benefits. Workers rejected a 3,050-rupee salary increase offer that did not include resolution of their other demands or the reinstatement of the victimised union representatives.

Following last week's breakdown in negotiations the TMEU said it would accept a minuscule 50-rupee monthly pay increase and a vague management commitment to continue wage talks after workers re-entered the plant if the company reinstated the sacked unionists.

The TMEU is now appealing to the state labour department and a former Congress party chief minister to intervene on their behalf.

Mine workers in Burma strike

Over 220 trainees recruited from 26 local villages in Burma's Letpadaung area to work at a joint mining venture between Chinese firm Wanbao and military company Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings walked off the job on April 10. The young workers, who have been receiving training for over five months, are demanding a pay rise, improved safety and other basic rights. They come from families who had land confiscated to make way for the sprawling open-cut mine.

The trainees want their meagre \$US120 monthly salary doubled

and safety equipment provided. One worker told media that most trainees were university graduates who are given menial but dangerous tasks, such as spreading acid on the ground. Strikers said they will resign if their demands are not met.

Striking Cambodian construction workers reach agreement

Two hundred workers employed by outsourcing companies at Kampot Cement in Kampot province, Cambodia ended a 24-hour strike after contractors Banjamat and S&B agreed to some of their demands. Workers downed tools on April 11 to demand a 90 percent increase to lift their pay to \$US130 a month, paid annual leave, days off on national holidays, long-term contracts, overall improvements in general working conditions and the reinstatement of fired unionists.

A Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Confederation (BWTUC) official told the media that the unionists were fired in November 2012, one month after forming a union. The Arbitration Council issued an order in 2012 for the reinstatement of sacked unionists and payment of wage entitlements.

The BWTUC, however, has only provided limited details of the return-to-work agreement. It reported that Banjamat and S&B would reinstate the sacked unionists, recognise the union, pay annual leave and introduce a check system for union dues.

Pakistan: Sacked Lahore education workers protest

Some 400 sacked teachers and non-teaching workers from the federal government's Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) at the Aysha Degree College began an indefinite sit-down protest outside the Punjab Assembly in Lahore on April 10 to demand reinstatement and back pay.

The workers said that their protest would continue until the federal government regularised employment and provided official leave and the same medical and pension benefits received by other ETPB employees. Demonstrators told the media that they were sacked after not being paid salaries for the past two months.

Paramedics demonstrate in Lahore

Services Hospital paramedics in Lahore protested for several hours outside the hospital on April 12 to demand employment regularisation and implementation of an approved service structure. The Punjab Paramedical Staff Association has called a meeting for April 21 to decide on further action.

The protest is part of a two-year campaign by an alliance of Punjab paramedics. The alliance claims that the government has shelved their service structure case, which would have guaranteed promotions and financial incentives for more than 90,000 paramedics and other government employees. It also failed to regularise the services of contract and daily wage employees, as promised in negotiations last year.

Pakistani utility workers demonstrate against privatisation

Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) workers held rallies in Pakistan's major cities on April 9 against the proposed privatisation of public sector entities. In Lahore they were joined by workers from other government-owned utilities, such as the Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited, Pakistan Railways and Pakistan International Airlines.

Organised by the All Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union, the demonstration is part of a long-running national campaign against privatisation. Under the International Monetary Fund's directive, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government has made privatisation of public sector utilities a priority.

The union campaign is restricted to limited strikes, protests and other techniques aimed at wearing workers down and preventing genuine unified industrial and political action by all public sector workers against privatisation and the government's social austerity demands.

Bangladeshi garment workers protest

Hundreds of ATS Pearl garment workers in Bangladesh's Chittagong Export Processing Zone demonstrated on the factory premises on April 10 to demand a yearly pay increment due in their last pay.

Police allege that some of the 1,700 employees damaged factory windows during the protest. Plant management later assured workers that they would fulfil their demands by April 25.

Australia and the Pacific

Australia: Super A-Mart reaches agreement with locked out workers

Thirty-five locked out Super A-Mart warehouse employees in Melbourne's north returned to work on April 15, ending a dispute over their first negotiated enterprise agreement. The National Union of Workers members were locked out of the furniture company warehouse on March 7, after taking strike action on February 28. The company obtained a Supreme Court injunction to stop them picketing the Somerton plant.

Super A-Mart employees, who had not had a wage rise in four years, were only paid \$20 an hour, \$4 less than other warehouse workers. They wanted an immediate pay increase to \$22 an hour, then to \$26 by the end of three years, rostered days off, and conversion to permanent work for casuals employed at the site for three months. Dangerous workplace conditions were also an issue.

The settlement included safety improvements, casual conversion to permanency after six months, improved redundancy, a 10 percent wage increase over three years and a \$750 sign on bonus.

SouthLink bus drivers in Adelaide vote to strike

Bus drivers employed by SouthLink, one of three public transport providers in South Australia's capital Adelaide, have voted for 24-hour strike action on Tuesday or Wednesday next week. Their action is part of a campaign begun in January by 600 Transport Workers Union (TWU) members at SouthLink and Transfield to demand a 5 percent pay rise, a work-roster review to reduce fatigue, and for improved driver security.

The companies claim that the South Australian Labor government's contract only allows for a 2.8 percent wage increase. Adelaide's third bus company, Torrens Transit, however, recently agreed to a 4.5 percent pay rise. In the past, the TWU has limited its members' action to four-hour stop work meetings and boycotted collecting fares or validating tickets.



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