

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

3 May 2014

Cambodian garment workers' strike in second week

About 20,000 employees at 30 garment factories in two Cambodian special economic zones have been on strike since the end of the Khmer New Year three-day holiday. The mass walkout began at the Tai Seng and Manhattan economic zones in Bavet city, Svay Rieng province, after employees returned to work on April 18 following scheduled national industrial action. The workers discovered that some companies had paid their employees a \$50 bonus for ignoring a previous national strike call.

Earlier in the month, eight labour unions called for garment workers to take a week's leave, including the Khmer New Year holiday, as a form of national industrial action in their campaign for a \$160 minimum monthly wage. The workers were also demanding the release of 21 activists and garment workers jailed during the last round of protests in January.

The provincial government has directed police and military into the two Bavet city economic zones. Cambodian authorities have a history of unprovoked violence directed at striking factory workers.

India: Mumbai air cargo workers on strike

On April 25, 700 cargo-handling workers at the Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport (CSIA) walked off the job over "inhumane" working conditions. The strike began after the customs department more than doubled the manual lifting load from 150 kg to 350 kg.

Workers allege inadequate infrastructure at the cargo section was forcing them to work long hours and leaving them stressed. A union official claimed that seven workers had died over the past four months from stress.

Workers have demanded that cargo over 150 kg be mechanically lifted. At the time of writing, the air cargo workers were maintaining their walkout. CSIA is India's major air cargo facility, handling nearly 600,000 metric tonnes of export cargo per year.

Karnataka university casual workers stop work

Casual employees at the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS) in Raichur, Karnataka, stopped work and protested outside the Deputy Commissioner's office on April 23 over plans to outsource their jobs. Workers from research centres in Gulbarga, Bheemarayanagudi, Bidar, Gangavati, Hagari and Sirguppa joined the demonstration.

The casual employees also want the reinstatement of sacked workers and payment of back wages, maintenance of attendance and pay-registers of casual labourers and medical facilities and equipment, rest rooms and a canteen.

A union official claimed that over 820 casual labourers, some with 15 years of service, would lose their jobs if the university outsourced their work. He also complained that university authorities had failed to maintain casual workers' attendance and payroll registers, and other necessary procedures, and had cheated the casual workers by deliberately miscalculating wages.

Pakistan government employees demand wage increase

Class IV public sector employees of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, in north-west Pakistan, demonstrated in Nowshera city on April 23 to demand timescale wage increases. The protesters, who temporarily blocked roads, said that their salaries failed to keep pace with rising living costs. The protest was called by the All Class-IV Association.

Pakistan education workers in Lahore protest

Teachers, librarians and administration staff employed by the federal government's EVACUEE Trust Property Board (ETPB) walked off the job in Lahore on April 29 to protest the non-regularisation of their soon-to-expire three-year contracts. Some employees have already worked more than three years.

The protesters accused the provincial education minister of ignoring a promise he made on April 11 to regularise the contracts within two weeks. The workers also said that their salaries were also overdue, an increasingly common problem throughout Pakistan.

On April 10, 400 sacked teachers and non-teaching ETPB employees at the Aysha Degree College demonstrated outside the Punjab Assembly in Lahore to demand reinstatement and back pay. Workers told the media that they were sacked after not being paid salaries for the past two months.

The Punjab government is currently negotiating with the federal government to take over ETPB assets across the province. The move is opposed by ETPB employees, who fear the agency will be sold and their jobs eliminated.

Australian Capital Territory garbage workers' union calls end to strike

A scheduled two-day strike by SITA Australia

garbage collectors in Canberra was called off by the Transport Workers Union (TWU) at 6.30 a.m. in May, shortly after the walkout began. A TWU official claimed that SITA Australia had offered a "significantly" improved enterprise agreement.

The TWU has been in negotiations for a new agreement with SITA for nine months. Garbage collectors claim that they were earning about \$100 less per week since SITA took over the Australian Capital Territory's waste collection contract in October 2013.

The union has released no details on the enterprise deal, which has not been endorsed by TWU members. A TWU negotiator told the media that there were still "some loose ends" and that workers had a "few queries" that needed to be discussed.

New South Wales bus drivers protest over safety

Bus drivers from Penrith, 50 km west of Sydney, stopped work for over an hour on April 30 to protest new on-time running schedules imposed by the New South Wales state Liberal government and transport provider Busways.

Drivers complained that there were not enough buses servicing the routes and that the timetables were impossible to maintain safely. One bus driver told the media that he tested one new route. "We didn't stop at any bus stops yet we were still four minutes behind schedule," he said.

In March, 50 bus drivers servicing the Parramatta bus interchange protested over overcrowding and public safety at the facility. The drivers said that the interchange was not designed to handle the 3,000 buses that pass through the facility each day, putting a strain on inadequate amenities.



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