

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

2 August 2014

## Bangladeshi garment workers on strike

For the second time this month, garment workers of five units of the Tuba Group at Badda in Dhaka have walked off the job over unpaid wages. Around 1,600 employees from Tuba Fashion, Tuba Textile, Bukshan Garments, Tayeb Design and Mita Design have been on a hunger strike since July 28 and protesting outside the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association premises in Dhaka.

At least 15 hunger strikers have fallen ill. Workers have demanded payment of salaries for May, June and July and the Eid bonus. The workers are covered by the Garment Workers Unity Forum.

At least nine Tuba workers were injured on July 9 when Dhaka police used water cannons, tear gas, birdshot and batons against 500 protesters who had walked out with the same demands. The latest strike was sparked when management failed to keep a commitment to pay wages and the Eid bonus by July 27.

## India: Tamil Nadu rail workers protest

Workers from the Egmore rail yard in Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, blocked the suburban rail line near the Chetpet railway station on July 30 to demand improved workplace facilities. Their protest, staged by the Southern Railway Mazdoor Union, temporarily stopped trains leaving Chennai station. Workers ended their protest after 30 minutes when railway officials claimed that their demands would be met.

## Andhra Pradesh transport workers threaten to strike

Workers at the Andhra Pradesh Road Transport Corporation (RTC) in Hyderabad have threatened to strike over the alleged theft of their savings from the Cooperative Credit Service (CCS). The RTC deducts 6 percent of each employee's salary and deposits it in the CCS. Their union has accused RTC of illegally withdrawing 2.3 billion rupees (\$US38.3 million) to pay wages

and finance the day-to-day running of the corporation.

Management claims it was forced to use the CCS funds because the state government did not release funds to cover the RTC budget. Some workers have begun a hunger strike.

## Jharkhand rural health workers to strike

More than 6,000 contractual workers of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) in India's eastern state of Jharkhand have given notice to the government that they will strike on August 4 if their demands for regularisation are not fulfilled. On July 26, workers wore black badges to work and resolved to hold demonstrations in 18 districts across the state.

The workers are demanding the creation of new posts and that priority be given to the contractual workers when filling up vacant positions.

Three times in the past, NRHM workers have called for strike action over the issue, but each time the Jharkhand State NRHM Contractual Workers Association leaders have called it off after the government falsely promised to "look into" their demands.

## Pakistan: Municipal workers end strike

Lakki city municipal workers in Pakistan's northwest province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ended a three-week strike on July 24 after the government—faced with a water shortages, piles of garbage and overflowing sewers—assured strikers that salary payments would be honoured before the Eidul Fitr religious holiday. Workers were not paid wages for three months.

## Lady Health Workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa protest

Lady Health Workers (LHWs), who provide health services to women in rural districts, demonstrated outside the Chief Minister's House in Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

province, on July 25 to demand unpaid salaries in time for the Eidul Fitr holiday. LHWs, who include medical staff, administrators and drivers, threatened to boycott an anti-polio drive.

### **Telephone Industries of Pakistan contract workers protest**

Telephone Industries of Pakistan (TIP) workers staged a sit-down protest outside the main gate of the TIP factory in Haripur, in Pakistan's northern province of Khyber. They brought traffic on Khanpur-Taxila Road to a standstill to demand unpaid salaries and the renewal of contracts.

The contract workers have not been paid since the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government issued a circular in February, ordering all ministries, state-owned enterprises and government departments not to renew employees' contracts after March 31. At least 800 TIP employees, some with 30 years' service, are affected.

A spokesman for the workers said their families were now desperate and they have threatened to self-immolate if their contracts are not renewed by August 4.

### **Sri Lankan hospital workers stop work**

Around 45,000 hospital workers, including minor employees, lift operators, cooks and telephone operators, went on sick leave on July 30 and joined colleagues who have been protesting outside the National Hospital in central Colombo since July 14 in a pay dispute. The large protest disrupted traffic in the national capital.

Workers marched toward the Presidential Secretariat to hand over a petition but were stopped by a large contingent of police. The main demand advanced by the Combined Trade Union Committee, representing 21 unions, is for the implementation of a government circular issued in 2006 to rectify salary anomalies.

### **Cambodian shoe factory workers end strike**

More than 1,000 employees at the Sun Well Shoes factory in Phnom Penh's Dangkor district ended a 14-day strike on July 28 after the company made several concessions to their demands for better pay and conditions. The workers, who earn just \$US105 a month, walked out on seven demands, including a \$15 monthly accommodation and travel allowance, \$5 per month for good attendance, guaranteed severance pay, better safety equipment and factory coverage of their tax payments.

A Workers Friendship Union Federation official said the strikers accepted an offer from the factory to pay them a \$50 annual bonus,

and \$5 per month for medical care, and provide better safety equipment, such as protective clothing. Other demands were rejected.

### **Western Australian maritime workers plan to strike**

Some 65 stevedores employed by Mermaid Marine Australia, which operates the Dampier Supply Base on the north coast of Western Australia, plan to strike for ten days from August 1 in a dispute over a new work agreement. This follows eight months of failed negotiations between the company and the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA).

An MUA official claimed that Mermaid was seeking to remove a number of safety and employee conditions from the existing agreement.

Mermaid's Dampier base supports offshore drilling operations and supplies materials to Chevron's \$US54 billion Gorgon project. BHP Billiton also uses the supply base.

### **Perth public hospital workers strike**

About 150 hospital support workers in Western Australia's capital Perth walked off the job for three hours on July 29. They demonstrated outside the Royal Perth Hospital to demand greater job security. The non-clinical staff, from five different hospitals, fear jobs will go when at least two hospitals close and others downsize once the new Fiona Stanley Hospital opens in the Perth suburb of Murdoch.

At least 5,000 staff, including cleaners, caterers, orderlies and other support workers are being kept in the dark about the future of their jobs. The Liberal-National Party state government has delayed announcing which jobs will go and whether workers will be forced to reapply for their jobs. The United Voice union has accepted the job cuts without mounting any campaign to defend them.



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