

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

16 August 2014

Bangladeshi garment workers strike in Savar

Thousands of garment workers of Yagi Bangladesh Garments in the Ashulia industrial area, in Savar on the outskirts of Dhaka, walked off the job on August 11 following the sudden dismissal of 26 fellow workers. Factory authorities claimed that the workers were sacked because they asked to be paid their salaries before the Eid religious holiday. Workers also wanted their July wages, which were due to be paid on Sunday.

The strikers said they would not return to until the sacked employees were reinstated and salaries paid. Ashulia Industrial Police have been deployed at the factory.

Meanwhile, on August 9, Helicon sweater factory workers in Savar demonstrated outside their plant against management's decision to cut basic salary and piece rates. Police intervened but there were no reported arrests.

India: Uttar Pradesh university staff on strike

Non-teaching staff at Lucknow University in India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh have been on strike since August 6 to demand regularisation of jobs, leave encashment for 300 days, and medical services. Most classrooms remain locked and administration services are severely affected. An official of the Lucknow University Employees Union said the strike would continue until their demands are met.

Gurgaon industrial belt auto workers strike

Workers at 12 auto manufacturing plants in the Gurgaon industrial belt, on the outskirts of Delhi in India's northern state of Haryana, stopped work for 24 hours on August 12 to oppose wage cuts and other attacks, include Hero Motor's decision to move its plant to the north-west state of Rajasthan.

The strike followed protests outside the Baxter, Hero Motor

Corp, Endurance, Degania Medical, Lumax, Lumax DK, Satyam Auto, Hilex India, Mitsubishi India, Bajaj Auto and Xvarian Auto plants to demand re-instatement of over 40 workers. The auto workers were suspended from the Hero Motor Corp and Bater India during strike action in September.

West Bengal taxi drivers end strike

Taxi drivers in Kolkata, capital of India's eastern state of West Bengal, ended a two-day strike on August 13, following unresolved negotiations with the government. The return to work was in response to the arrest of 21 strikers on trumped-up charges and imposition of a 3,000-rupee bail, which the government threatened to increase. Drivers walked out to demand fare increases.

Pakistan: Lady Health Workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa protest

Lady Health Workers (LHWs), who provide vital health services to rural women in the Timergara district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, demonstrated outside the Timergara Press Club on August 11. They were demanding unpaid wages for conducting special anti-polio and anti-measles campaigns in the province. Protesters complained that the provincial government had ignored an order from the Peshawar High Court to release their wages. LHWs also wanted a salary increase to compensate for performing the work of NGOs. They warned they would strike if their claims were not resolved soon.

Bangle-making workers in Hyderabad protest

On August 9, the Home-Based Women Bangle Workers Union, representing 600,000 glass-bangle industry workers, demonstrated outside the Hyderabad Press Club in Sindh province to demand the government implement their demands. This included a wage rise, registration with the social security department, and health and education facilities for their children. They also wanted computerised national identity cards, proper power, water and gas supplies in their localities and an improved sewerage system.

The union claims that the home-based industry produced multi-million rupee profits annually but that workers were deprived of basic facilities. A spokesperson told the media that workers suffered from a range of diseases, including cancer, blindness, TB, rheumatism and skin problems, caused by toxic chemicals used in bangle-making.

Sri Lankan port workers protest in central Colombo

Colombo Port workers demonstrated at the Khan Clock Tower on August 13 with six major demands. These included reinstatement of a 20 percent allowance abolished in 2006, a 150,000-rupee (\$US1,150) bonus, incentives based on the US dollar, and the retirement age lifted to 60 years without conditions.

A Trade Union Alliance representative at the port told the media that workers' demands were forwarded to authorities three months ago but no response was received.

Queensland court orders end to strike at LNG construction site

On August 11, Australia's industrial relations court Fair Work Australia ruled that a strike by 148 construction workers at the \$60 billion natural gas processing site at Curtis Island, near Gladstone, Queensland was not "protected industrial action" and ordered a return to work. Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members walked off the job on August 7 and are maintaining a picket at the APLNG wharf in Gladstone in defiance of the court order.

Most construction workers, who travel each day by bus, have refused to cross the picket line. The site has 8,000 employees.

The CFMEU with three other unions—the Communications Electrical and Plumbing Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Australian Workers Union—are in dispute with US construction company Bechtel over a new work agreement. After ten months of negotiations Bechtel has offered back pay, a \$35 ferry allowance, a 15 percent pay rise,

daily productivity pay, a \$45 daily travel allowance, increasing to \$50 in November, and a \$10 per day attendance allowance rising to \$30 in November.

The construction workers want the current fly-in, fly-out roster changed from four weeks on and one week off to three on and one off, in line with most other remote construction sites around Australia. They have vowed to reject the company offer in a secret ballot currently underway.

Victorian university staff and students protest

Hundreds of students and staff at LaTrobe University in Melbourne protested on campus on August 11 as part of a campaign against the axing of 350 jobs at the university. Protesters were told by speakers at the rally that the cuts would affect university services for students, with fewer courses and subjects, and reduce faculty, library and laboratory staff.

The protest was organised by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), which has steered the protest into an impotent appeal to the University Council to withdraw the cuts.

Northern Territory public school teachers to strike

Public school teachers in Palmerston and the Northern Territory capital Darwin will strike on August 20 following a year of failed negotiations for a new enterprise bargaining agreement with the Territory's Liberal-Country Party government. The Australian Education Union NT branch said teachers had already rejected the government's last offer.

The planned walk-out follows limited industrial action across the Territory that began in November and a one-day strike at 27 remote schools in March after teachers rejected 3 percent annual pay increases over four years. Northern Territory's current inflation rate is 3.9 percent.

Teachers said the main issue preventing an agreement was their demand for job protection clauses in any new agreement. The territory government plans to axe at least 420 teaching positions within three years, down from the current 2,500, and eliminate about 1,000 contract teaching and ancillary jobs from the current 4,000 positions.



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