

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

13 September 2014

## Locked out Designer Jeans workers in Bangladesh protest

Over 100 Designer Jeans workers at Jamgora in Ashulia formed a human chain along the Dhaka-Tangail highway on September 8 to demand reappointment of terminated workers, withdrawal of a case filed by the factory management against the workers, and permission to form the Designer Jeans Workers' Union.

Several hundred Designer Jeans workers have been locked out since August 27, following a strike the day before to protest the dismissal of two of their colleagues who complained of mistreatment by management. Police were called and filed cases against 14 workers, accusing them of assaulting the factory's chief security officer.

As further punishment, factory authorities sacked 125 workers alleging "violating discipline," and filed a case against 260 workers with the Ashulia police, accusing them of vandalising and looting the factory. Only 108 of the accused workers have been able to secure bail.

## India: Strike by NLC contract workers escalates

Close to 11,000 contract workers at state-owned Neyvile Lignite Corp. (NLC) in Tamil Nadu have defied a court order and are maintaining their strike begun on September 4. After failed talks on Monday between NLC management, contract workers' representatives and the Labour Department, the union, representing 12,500 permanent workers, said its members would join the walkout.

Together with long-standing demands for job permanency, workers want monthly wages increased to 25,000 rupees (\$416), up from current levels which range from 5,000 to 8,000 rupees (\$83 to \$133), until they became part of the permanent work force. They also want a 20 percent bonus on their monthly wages, an increase on the current 8.33 percent. The strike was called by the Joint Action Council (JAC), a coalition of national and regional unions.

## Haryana public transport workers end strike

Thousands of Haryana Roadways employees ended a state-wide two-day strike on September 8 after the state government agreed to suspend plans to further privatise commuter bus services and to make all employees permanent. The Haryana government had previously announced that it would issue permits for private bus operators to service over 3,500 routes across the state.

Haryana Roadways is a state-owned public transport company with a

fleet of over 3,900 buses and nearly 19,000 staff. Workers ended a four-day strike in January after the government only agreed to make 8,200 employees permanent.

## Tamil Nadu nurses launch hunger strike

On September 8, about 450 nurses from Tamil Nadu government hospitals held a protest hunger strike demanding job permanency, timely promotions and increased staffing levels to end 12-hour shifts. Around 4,500 nurses are employed in Tamil Nadu government hospitals and health centres on a contract basis.

## Pakistan: Sindh province municipal workers walk out

On September 8, municipal workers in Mirpur Khas, a city in Pakistan's Sindh province, walked off the job and established a protest tent outside the Municipal Committee's offices in a dispute over unpaid wages. Workers said they would remain on strike until their salaries were paid.

## Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Lady Health Workers strike again

For the third time in six weeks Lady Health Workers (LHWs) in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province walked out in a long-running dispute for job permanency. About 800 LHWs in the Swabi district struck on September 6 over the issue. Their action followed two national strikes in August to demand unpaid wages and permanency.

LHWs are only paid 8,000 rupees (\$US80) per month whereas the minimum wage for permanent workers is 12,000 rupees. They are also denied bonuses and allowances paid to other government employees. The health workers provide vital health services in rural and other difficult areas.

## Cambodia: Xin Fang garment factory sacks striking workers

The Taiwanese-owned Xin Fang garment factory in Phnom Penh's Pur Senchey district sacked 100 striking employees after they refused to return to work on September 8. Over 400 workers had been on strike since

August 18 over 19 demands. Three hundred had returned to work following a September 2 court directive to the Coalition of Cambodia Apparel Workers' Democratic Union (CCAWDU). One hundred workers vowed to maintain the strike until their demands were met. Their demands include a lunch allowance, benefits for pregnant women and new mothers, a \$3 bonus for working on holidays, and a \$15 monthly accommodation allowance. Workers also want the reinstatement of two sacked CCAWDU representatives.

### **Cambodian footwear factory employees ordered back to work**

Around 5,000 striking workers from the Juhui Footwear factory in Kompong Cham province returned to work following a court injunction on September 10. They originally walked out on September 1 over 15 demands but returned to work after the company promised to hold talks. The footwear workers struck again after management told them they had to align themselves with the company or their union—not both.

The footwear workers were demanding a \$1 daily lunch allowance, skilled-worker payments and 2,000 riel (\$US0.50) for every hour of overtime. Although the strikers followed the court order and returned to work they have said they will not drop their demands.

### **Casino staff in Macau, China threaten to walk out**

More than 130 staff from SJM, one of Macau's biggest gaming operators, have threatened to strike if casino bosses do not respond to their demands for higher wages and better working conditions. Workers complained to the city's Labour Affairs Bureau about restrictions on sick leave entitlements and arrangements during typhoons.

SJM dealers' monthly salaries range between 16,000 and 19,000 patacas (\$US2,380). A representative from the Forefront of Macau Gaming union said the workers want 19,000 to 21,000 patacas a month.

Casino staff from six Macau gambling establishments have protested in recent months over pay and conditions. About 1,000 SJM workers demonstrated last month and on September 6, 1,000 employees from the Grand Lisboa casino took unprecedented work-to-rule action.

Casinos in Macau, a former Portuguese enclave, employ over 57,500 full-time workers. Over 25,000 are dealers who earn an average monthly wage of 17,530 patacas.

### **South Australian nurses begin industrial action**

Some 40 emergency department nurses at Adelaide's Lyell McEwin Hospital have imposed work bans on selected administrative tasks in a dispute with SA Health about staffing levels. The Nursing and Midwifery Federation said the government had failed to provide four extra staff in the emergency department as part of a dedicated resuscitation team. Currently nurses are taken from other areas in the emergency ward to make up the resuscitating team, increasing waiting times for other patients.

Long emergency ward waiting times have been a major issue over several years for ambulance paramedics in Adelaide. Ambulance Employees Association members took industrial action in April 2013 over the issue. Union members said that on several occasions that month up to

28 ambulances had been tied up for extended periods outside emergency wards at several Adelaide hospitals.

### **Food processing workers vote on industrial action**

Food-processing workers at Simplot plants in Devonport and Ulverstone in Tasmania and Kelso and Bathurst in New South Wales (NSW) have begun voting in a ballot to decide whether to take industrial action after negotiations on a new collective agreement with company management stalled.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union wants 4 percent annual pay increases over three years and retention of existing conditions. Simplot wants a wage freeze for year one, 2 percent increases in years two and three at its NSW plants and 2 percent each year for the next three years at its Tasmanian factories. The ballot results were to be announced by the Australian Electoral Commission on September 12.

### **New Zealand government sector workers strike**

Around 400 government sector employees in Statistics New Zealand walked off the job nationally on September 9 in a dispute for a new work agreement. At least 70 workers marched from Statistics House on Wellington's waterfront to Parliament and the State Services Commission, which ultimately controls workers' salaries.

Pay negotiations broke down three weeks ago between the Public Service Association (PSA) and Statistics New Zealand. The PSA wants performance-based pay rises to be more transparent and equal across the department, as well as clearly defined pay grades.

### **Vanuatu hotel workers reinstated**

Fifty-two workers at the exclusive Warwick Le Lagon Hotel in Port Vila were reinstated on September 6, following a threat by 100 fellow employees to walk out if their colleagues were not re-employed. The sackings occurred after kitchen staff struck over claims for a tool allowance and the docking of wages. Police were called in to evict them from the hotel but they refused to leave.

Employees returned to work after ten hours when a representative of the Vanuatu National Union of Workers and management reached agreement. Details of the agreement were not made public.



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