

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

20 December 2014

## India: Maharashtra public school teachers strike

Some 700,000 teachers and non-teaching staff at 60,000 government schools in Maharashtra state struck for 24 hours on December 12 after the state education authority in July rendered more than 45,000 teachers surplus and did not pay their salaries. The decision was taken by the directorate of education in line with a new student-teacher ratio stipulated in the so-called Right to Education Act.

The Maharashtra government responded to the walkout by issuing a statement on Tuesday claiming that “surplus” teachers will be paid until they find new jobs. The circular also instructed district education officials to employ the teachers in schools that have vacancies.

The strike was called by the Shishak Bharati, an umbrella organisation of the various teachers’ unions.

## South Korean shipbuilding workers strike again

Close to 5,000 workers at Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI), the world’s largest shipbuilder, walked off the job for seven hours at its Ulsan plant on December 17 in a dispute for a pay increase. Production stopped during the strike and about 200 union delegates demonstrated outside HHI’s head office in Seoul. Their action followed four-hour strikes on November 27 and December 4. HHI and the 18,000-member union have had over 50 rounds of talks since June. Negotiations resumed on Thursday.

The union wants monthly base pay increased by 6.5 percent (132,000 won) and a one-off bonus equal to 10 weeks’ wages. The company has only offered a 37,000-won raise, a 5 million-won (\$US4,500) bonus, and to extend the retirement age from 58 to 60. The union has also called on HHI to drop a performance-based annual salary system, which pays bonuses according to employees’ performance ratings. The bonuses were previously paid to all workers.

## Sri Lankan power and water utility workers demonstrate

About 1,000 Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) contract workers demonstrated outside the CEB head office in Colombo Fort on December 17 to demand permanency for nearly 5,000 contract workers recruited through manpower agencies. The demonstration spilled onto the streets causing a heavy traffic jam in central Colombo.

The power and energy minister falsely claimed in November that the contract workers would be made permanent Ceylon Electricity Board employees from December 1.

In a separate demonstration, manpower contract workers for the National Water Supplies and Drainage Board staged a one-day sit-down hunger protest outside the Water Supply and Drainage ministry in Kotte, on the outskirts of Colombo. Workers complained that President Mahinda Rajapakse had failed to keep an election promise, reaffirmed in the last budget presentation in November, that temporary employees at all government departments, corporations, and statutory bodies would be made permanent.

## Pakistan: Teachers and education workers protest about unpaid wages

Daily-wage teaching and non-teaching staff at Federal Directorate of Education (FED)-run schools and colleges have been demonstrating outside the National Press Club in Islamabad on weekends and in front of the FDE offices on week days since December 10 over delayed salary payments and service regularisation. At least 3,000 employees have not been paid for six months.

According to protesters, the Islamabad High Court ordered the FDE to make employees permanent and adjust salaries by December 15. The court order has not been complied with.

Over 200 schoolteachers, mostly females, of the Social Action Programme (SAP) from the seven districts of Gilgit-Baltistan, the northern most administrative territory of Pakistan, have been staging a sit-in in the territory’s capital Gilgit since November 18 to demand permanency and payment of withheld salaries. An SAP teachers’ association spokesperson said that many teachers and their children had to be hospitalised during the protest because of cold weather. The teachers have vowed to continue the protests.

Around 750 SAP schools were established in the territory’s remote areas with the assistance of the World Bank in 1994. In 2009 the schools were handed over to the National Education Foundation (NEF). Teachers were told that their salaries would be increased and their services regularised. The promise was not kept.

## Sindh health workers strike demanding job regularisation

Around 300 contract workers at a government-run Hepatitis

Prevention & Control Program in Sindh province walked off the job on December 12 to demand job permanency. The program's centres and clinics across the province remained closed while workers in Hyderabad established a protest camp. Strikers returned to work on December 17, after a government official told workers that he would represent their complaint to authorities.

Workers condemned government cuts which led to medicine and other supply shortages for the program. A program official told the media that the hepatitis control program had been facing shortages for the last two months.

### **New South Wales explosives truck drivers strike**

Some 130 truck drivers employed by Orica Explosives to Hunter region mines in New South Wales walked off the job for four hours on December 16 in an enterprise agreement dispute.

At least 90 percent of drivers, who operate from Orica's Newcastle chemical manufacturing plant, rejected the company's latest "below inflation" wage offer in a recent ballot. Other unresolved issues include the roles of drivers, who deliver the product, and shot firers who set up the explosives at the mine sites. The drivers are members of the Transport Workers Union (TWU).

### **Lockouts at DP World shipping terminals continue**

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members employed by Dubai Ports World were locked out for 16 hours on December 15 and 16. The workers had been planning a four-hour stoppage as part of protected industrial action for a new enterprise agreement. Negotiations have been underway for over 10 months.

Rallies to oppose the lockout were held outside the union's office in Sydney on December 15 and outside Citibank headquarters, the company which owns 75 percent of DP World, in Melbourne on December 17.

The MUA claims that DP World is attempting to establish a two-tier workforce by undermining penalty rates for new workers. It also wants to impose longer hours in more consecutive shifts, remove the Picnic Day and public holiday rates, and introduce spy cameras at work places. The company and the union will meet for conciliation talks at Fair Work Australia in early January.

### **New Zealand family care workers suspended without pay**

Anglican Family Care (AFC) management in Dunedin, Alexandra and Balclutha on New Zealand's South Island suspended 27 employees without pay on December 15 after they imposed industrial bans. Primary Services Association (PSA) members have been working to rule and refusing to wash company cars since December 8. They are demanding a pay rise that matches adjustments to the consumer price index.

PSA members and their supporters protested outside AFC premises in Dunedin on Tuesday and then returned to work after agreeing to end industrial action. Management lifted the suspensions and agreed to enter mediated negotiations.

### **New Zealand hospital kitchen workers walk out**

Food preparation workers employed by the Auckland, Counties Manukau and Waitemata district health boards walked off the job on December 15. The strike followed news that food services will be contracted to Compass Group, a British multinational specialising in food and cleaning services.

The Service and Food Workers Union (SFWU) members fear that they will lose their jobs if food preparation is privatised. The SFWU has not planned any industrial action and is appealing to the Auckland Metro District Health Boards to "reconsider" their decision.

The health boards claim that contracting out food services will save up to \$90m over 15 years. Compass Group currently provides 44 percent of all patient meals in New Zealand.

### **New Zealand port workers begin industrial action**

Over 200 workers at Lyttelton Port of Christchurch (LPC) in Lyttelton on New Zealand's South Island imposed an overtime ban on December 17 following nearly five months of failed negotiations for a new work agreement. The Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) members, who make up half of the front-line workers at the port, had previously voted for multiple full work stoppages. The union, however, has currently limited them to an overtime ban.

According to the RMTU, the main unresolved issues were safety, productivity and equity. The union wants to bring cargo handlers at LPC's inland port at Woolston into the collective agreement. Woolston workers are currently paid \$6 per hour less than their colleagues at Lyttelton. LPC has only offered a 2 percent pay increase and refused to negotiate on other issues.

Last financial year LPC's CEO Peter Davie was given an 18 percent pay rise taking his salary to \$1.2 million.



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