

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

3 January 2015

## India: Tamil Nadu public transport workers end strike

Around 140,000 State Transport Corporation workers, covered by 11 unions, ended their state-wide strike on Wednesday after the Tamil Nadu government agreed to form a tripartite committee to conduct negotiations on their 28 demands. Workers walked off the job on December 28, demanding a wage revision pending from September 2013 and the payment of other benefits. The government immediately deployed hundreds of police to bus terminals where they began arresting striking workers.

More than 22,000 of the state's bus services, 80 percent, were affected on each day of the strike. The Anna Thozhir Sangam Peravai (ATSP) trade union, supported by the AIADMK (All India Anna Dravidian Progress Federation) ruling party in Tamil Nadu, opposed the strike and ordered its members to work overtime to reduce the impact of the stoppage.

## Police arrests continue at Foxconn factory in Tamil Nadu

Following the arrest of 200 protesting workers outside Foxconn's factory complex in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu last week, a further 150 protesting employees were arrested last Monday. The workers had attempted to force entry into the mobile phone plant that is earmarked for closure at the end of the month. On December 22, workers arrived at the factory to find the gates shut and a notice stating that management had suspended operations because it had no work.

The Foxconn India factory lost 70 percent of its business in March after Nokia India closed its Sriperumbudur facility. Nothing was resolved by several rounds of talks involving the union bureaucracy, company management and labour department officials. Foxconn announced it would consider offering a voluntary retirement scheme or severance package. A Foxconn India Employees Union representative said that about 1,700 workers were affected, including 100 who live on the premises.

## Indian Telangana mine workers strike

Thousands of contract workers of the Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) launched a two-day strike on December 29 in the Kothagudem region, Telangana state, to demand a wage increase, job security, health coverage and other benefits. Rallies and sit-down protests were organised in various parts of the region's coal belt during the strike.

Representatives of the Singareni Collieries Workers Union, Singareni Collieries Employees Union, and Singareni Coal Miners Labour Union took part in the demonstrations. Bureaucrats with the Telangana Boggu Gani Karmika Sangham (TGBKS), the recognised trade union of the SCCL, reportedly did not participate.

## Sri Lankan telecom workers on strike

Close to 2,700 telecom contract workers in Colombo Fort have been on strike since December 29 demanding permanent positions. Many have been working for as long as 16 years as contractual employees of manpower agencies like Human Capital Solutions. Talks between the All Employees' Union of Information and Telecommunication (AEUIT) and the government ended on December 31 without any agreement reached.

Strikers told the *World Socialist Web Site* that they have held several strikes in the past over the issue of contract labour, but the government and the telecom administration refused their demands. They accused the trade union leaders of not wanting to take up a political struggle against the government. The AEUIT has tried to divert the workers concerns, telling them that the Mahinda Rajapakse government will meet their demands in the wake of the presidential election.

## Pakistan: Karachi health workers protest against privatisation

On December 26, doctors, paramedics and other health workers from the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases, and National Institute of Child Health stopped work and held a protest march in Karachi. The industrial action was called in opposition to the planned handover of hospital management to the private sector.

Outpatient departments remained closed during the strike and most other services were affected. Traffic on several main roads in the city was also disrupted. Police, wielding batons, unsuccessfully tried to disperse the marching protesters. The Sindh Health Employees Joint Action Committee, founded by the employees of the three hospitals, suspended the protest later that day as government authorities agreed to discuss their demands.

Health sector employees are running a long campaign against gradual restructuring and privatisation of Pakistan's public health services. While the Sindh provincial government is planning to privatise most leading health services, the intervention of the union bureaucracies has ensured that protests have remained isolated to particular sectors and regions.

### **Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa immunisation health workers protest**

Hundreds of health workers of the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) in Pakistan's northern province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa have been demonstrating outside Peshawar's provincial assembly since December 29, protesting the non-payment of salaries for eight months. Protesters have also demanded that 300 contract workers be given permanent positions.

A spokesman for the EPI Members Association said the sit-in protest will continue outside the provincial assembly until their demands are met.

Increasing numbers of government workers are having their wages held by the government, in many cases for several months. Cash strapped federal as well as provincial governments have implemented drastic cuts to basic social services and infrastructure, attempting to meet performance targets set by the International Monetary Fund under a bailout agreement reached in 2013.

### **Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa wool mill workers protest**

Labourers of Bannu Woollen Mills, in Bannu city, demonstrated on the Bannu-Dera Ismail Khan road on December 28 to protest against the non-payment of minimum wages. A spokesman for the workers said the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government had fixed the minimum monthly wage for labourers in 2014 at 15,000 rupees (\$US149), but the mills' owners had secured a stay order against the decision from the district court.

Workers threatened that they will strike if the court does not dismiss the stay order when it makes its decision on the case on January 6.

### **South Korean shipbuilding workers end action**

The union representing 18,000 workers at Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI), the world's largest shipbuilder, has called an end to two months of limited strike action at the company's Ulsan plant after reaching a tentative agreement with management on a new wages deal. Workers implemented several four-hour stoppages in November and December, demanding that monthly base pay be increased by 6.5 percent and payment of a one-off bonus equal to 10 weeks' wages. Workers rejected management's offer for a 37,000-won (2 percent) pay rise and a 5 million-won (\$US4,500) bonus.

Under the agreement, the union accepted the company's original offer for a 2 percent pay increase. In addition, workers will be given company stocks equivalent to 150 percent of their base monthly salary, together with another 2 million won as a bonus. The deal will be subject to a vote by union and non-union workers early in January.

### **Queensland coal and freight train drivers on strike**

Several hundred coal and freight train drivers in the Mackay Region, Queensland, plan to strike for 24-hours this Saturday, as part of their 18-month pay dispute with rail operator Aurizon. Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members at the company's Jilalan depot will strike, while members at the Pring depot, serving the Newlands coal district near

Bowen, the Coppabella depot south west of Mackay and the Callemondah depot in Gladstone will impose an overtime ban from today through to January 7.

Drivers are concerned that Aurizon had moved to terminate the current enterprise agreement and take away existing conditions. A RTBU representative said members rejected Aurizon's attempt to introduce changes to penalty rates and rosters as part of the new agreement. He claimed that management had refused to enter into negotiations for the past 12 months.

The company has offered annual 4 percent pay increases, but is attempting to justify reducing conditions and entitlements by saying it wants workplace agreements comparable to its competitors.

### **New Zealand port workers maintain work bans**

More than 200 workers at Lyttelton Port of Christchurch (LPC), in Lyttelton on New Zealand's South Island, are maintaining an overtime ban imposed on December 17 following five months of failed negotiations for a new work agreement. The action by Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) members, who make up half of the front-line workers at the port, has forced the closure of the container terminal on weekends due to the lack of maintenance workers.

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.

### **Papua New Guinea remote teachers demand leave entitlements**

At least 1,400 public school teachers from Hela and Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea are stranded in their respective provinces because leave entitlements have not been paid. The entitlements include fares that allow teachers to return to their family homes for the Christmas and New Year holiday festivities. According to the PNG Teachers Association (PNGTA) the provincial government waited until December 19 before announcing that there was no money to pay for leave fares this year because government accounts were closed for Christmas and New Year.

Teachers threatened that when the schools reopen next year they will strike until their entitlements are paid.



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